

**ENCOUNTERING RACISM IN THE IVORY TOWERS: A QUALITATIVE  
ANALYSIS OF LATINO STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

A Dissertation

by

KATHRIN ANN PARKS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Joe Feagin
Committee Members,	Mark Fossett
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## **ABSTRACT**

Encountering Racism in the Ivory Towers: A Qualitative Analysis of Latino Student Experiences in Higher Education. (December 2007)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Joe Feagin

Currently, there is a significant gap in the literature on what Latino students are subjected to at predominately white universities regarding white racism and discrimination. If students of color face racism on university campuses, this could negatively impact their experiences while in college and perhaps the likelihood of their matriculation. This research focuses on whether or not Latino students are being treated differently because of their race, what patterns of discrimination exist for this group, and whether or not regional factors, as well as demographic factors influence these experiences.

Feagin's theory of systemic racism was the guiding framework for this study. According to this perspective, white racism permeates various levels of our society and is a foundational aspect of our country, both historically and contemporarily. Individual actors operate in the context of a system of racism, which occurs at the individual, institutional, and societal levels all at once. This dynamic informs this research. In order to get at the lived experiences of Latino students, qualitative interview methodology was

used. Approximately 28 students on three campuses participated in face-to-face, in-depth interviews.

Overwhelmingly, students faced various types of discrimination and racism both on and off-campus. This study contributes to the race and education literature by providing an in-depth analysis of how mistreatment based on race plays out for these students on both the individual and institutional level. It also suggests that white racism is still an issue for students of color and that the system of racism can have an impact on their educational experiences. Suggestions are made about how the institution of education could change in order to better suit the needs of its increasingly diverse student population.

## **DEDICATION**

To my family who has always supported me with love, to my friends who have inspired and encouraged me, to the faculty who have challenged me in so many ways, and to the students who shared their stories to make this research possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Because I can already predict that I will not do justice to all the people who have helped me through this process, I'm choosing to keep this brief. The length of these acknowledgements does not represent my gratitude for all the wonderful people in my life.

First, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Joe Feagin. Your work inspired me as an undergraduate student and continues to do so today. I appreciate the wisdom and guidance that you have given me throughout this process. My thanks also go to Dr. Mark Fossett, Dr. Joseph Jewell, and Dr. Ken Meier. All of you have been of great assistance to me in shaping this research. Thanks also to you all for the financial support you provided or directed me to that helped support me throughout the years. Thanks also to all of the teachers (graduate school and beyond) who have helped me become the person that I am today.

I would not have been able to get to this point without the help and encouragement from my wonderful friends (who literally live all over the world!) Being able to discuss, vent, laugh, share, study, and just have fun with you all has kept me sane! I feel so blessed to have so many fantastic, inspiring, hilarious, and intelligent people in my life. Special thanks go to Mike Sconzo ("Soosh"), who has been there for me more times than I can count. There are no words to express how grateful I am that you are in my life.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to follow this dream. I love you all so very much!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This is my 7<sup>th</sup> semester here. In all my semesters, I've never seen like racial tensions like I have right now. (Oh really? What's going now?) Um, it's just like everything that's been going on. Like students in the law school had like a ghetto party. They dressed up as stereotypically hip-hop clothing, and they wore like nameplates of stereotypically black and Latino last names. Um, there was a black face incident during Halloween where a couple of students took some pictures and they posted them online on facebook.com. It was a couple of members from a historically white fraternity. And, I mean the immigration thing is always, lately. I mean especially since last year, it's been at the forefront. Even I mean yesterday the Young Conservatives had an Affirmative Action bake sale. It's kinda um, like their own way of protesting the affirmative action policies in this country. So it seems like every, literally like every month two very big things happen, just like racial tension. I mean...usually like every semester like one or two big things happen, like at the most, but this semester its literally been like one or two big things every month. Southern University Male, 22

Many whites feel that racism and discrimination is no longer a salient issue in the United States today. They feel that racism was something that happened in the past, prior to the Civil Rights Movement, and that today, society is more equal. The student's comments above demonstrate that not only is racism alive and well in our society, but from his experience at his university, it has gotten worse. The frequency of racialized events has increased, and notably incidents of racism were never absent from his memory of his time at the university. Whites mocked people of color by wearing stereotypical costumes portraying these groups negatively or wearing blackface at a party. On this particular campus, the Martin Luther King Jr. statue has been vandalized

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This dissertation follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

twice since 2003, once occurring on the day commemorating him. Additionally, white students made their views against affirmative action known in a bake sale that occurred a day before I talked to this student. These are only a few of many incidents that students talked about occurring on their campuses. There is an expectation that college campuses are more tolerant and egalitarian than the outside world. However, students of color still face struggles when they are at predominantly white institutions. “As recently as 1968, students of color in America could look back on 332 years of racial segregation and exclusion from American colleges and universities. Many citizens—in fact, the majority—now believe that political and educational reforms during the past three decades have erased over three centuries of racial discrimination” (Anderson 2002, 19). This expectation of equality in the ivory towers does not match the reality of what students of color encounter.

In fact, a student from Southern University talked about this very issue during her interview. “And they also think that they have been negatively impacted by affirmative action. And in addition to that, they also believe that there’s no such thing as discrimination. They think that’s something that happened in the 60s. So, their awareness of the social issues are limited to their own scope and because they’re not the affected population they just refuse to acknowledge that it exists. So um, it is very interesting. It’s very interesting.” Some whites today think of racism as something that happens to them. They feel that they are being denied things they deserve (like a spot in the university or a scholarship), because of students of color. And beyond that, students

of color are complaining about nothing, because discrimination is something that was solved long ago. However, this research will demonstrate that students of color continue to face white racism in various forms both on their campuses and in the greater community, and that whites continue to benefit from their privilege in today's society.

In this dissertation, I examine Latino/a student experiences in higher education, specifically their experiences with racism and discrimination. Currently, there is a gap in the literature on what Latino students are subjected to at predominately white universities. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) interviewed African American students attending white institutions of higher education. They found that black students do not get the same college experience that white students have in a variety of ways. African American students experience numerous acts of discrimination by fellow students, and sometimes faculty and staff, and this discrimination manifests itself in both overt and covert ways. This type of analysis had not been previously applied to Latino students and this is a significant gap in the education and race literature. I have found in this research that Latino students also have atypical college experiences when compared to white students, because of the enduring impact of systemic racism.

### **Educational Lag**

Disparities in education for Latinos have been found at the primary and secondary education levels, impacting graduation rates, performance, and future educational options (Valencia, Menchaca, and Donato 2002; Pearl 2000; AAUW 1999; Meier and Stewart 1991). According to the 2006 Current Population Survey, Latinos had the lowest proportion of adults with a high school education compared to other

groups. In fact, only fifty-nine percent of adult Latinos surveyed had a high school diploma, compared with 91 percent of whites, 87 percent of Asians, and 81 percent of African Americans (Bergman, U.S. Census 2007.) This represents a huge gap for Latinos in terms of high school completion. Additionally, deficient preparation from lower levels of schooling can have an impact on student success in higher education when, and if, they are able to attain that level of educational achievement in the first place.

Inadequate education for Latinos could have a serious impact on the labor force, as well as the opportunities for a growing proportion of the population. “The future work force mirrors the changing student body; over the next 20 years, almost all of the net additions to the work force will be women, members of minority groups, or immigrants-many of them persons who, at the present, are being ill-prepared by the schools” (Bouvier and Poston 1993, p. 57). As the labor market continues to expand for those with higher education, the importance of educational attainment and success for people of color is becoming more and more crucial.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in colleges and universities has increased over the last 25 years. In 1976, Hispanic students made up 3.5% of the students enrolled in degree granting institutions. By 2000, that percentage increased to 9.8% and given the demographic trends mentioned earlier, those numbers should continue to increase (U.S. Department of Education 2002). Despite the increase in enrollment, there has not been remarkable progress in increasing the number of Latinos obtaining degrees. Hispanic

completion rates have been consistently below that of white students, as well as African Americans (U.S. Department of Education 2007.)

When looking at the data about higher education attainment from the 2006 Current Population Survey, again we find that Latinos are lagging behind. We see in Table 1.1, many more whites than Latinos had graduated from high school.

Table 1.1 Percent of High School and College Graduates of the Population 15 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2006								
	Hispanic (of any race) and Both Sexes	Total	High School Graduate Status			Bachelor's Degree Status		
			Total	Not high school graduate	High school graduate or higher	Total	Less than Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
			%	%	%	%	%	%
Latinos	18 years and over	28366 (12.1%)	100.0	40.1	59.9	100.0	89.2	10.8
Whites	18 years and over	179355 (80.3%)	100.0	14.7	85.3	100.0	74.0	26.0
N= 233194 Current Population Survey 2006								

Additionally, 26 percent of whites surveyed had earned a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to only 10 percent of Latinos.

Another way to understand this lag is to look at the number of students who have attained various levels of education. In Table 1.2, we again see Latinos falling behind



<b>Table 1.2 Educational Attainment of the Population 15 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2006</b>											
Hispanic (of any race) and Both Sexes	Educational Attainment										
	Total	None	< high school grad	High school grad	Some college no degree	AA occup - ationa l	AA, acade -mic	BA/BS	MS/MA	Profess- ional degree	Ph.D.
Latinos 18 yrs +	28,366	537	10,844	8,250	4,134	817	733	2,197	578	178	97
Whites 18 yrs +	179,355	679	25,718	56,647	34,424	7,959	7,310	31,082	10,936	2,595	2,005
N= 233194 Current Population Survey 2006											

Of the 28,366 Latinos surveyed, almost 40 percent had less than a high school education, compared to only 14 percent of whites. Additionally, whites had greater levels of attainment of higher education. Seventeen percent of whites surveyed had earned a bachelor's degree compared to only 8 percent of Latinos. The lag continues as the level of education increases (which could explain the lack of Latino faculty that students will report later in this study.)

Another report by NCES (U.S. Department of Education 2003) studied the reasons for student attrition from post-secondary education. These students left without obtaining a degree and did not return within three years of departure. Using data from 1996–98 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), this study analyzed several variables that impact retention, including the type of school the student attended (public or private), academic performance (GPA and test scores), student educational goals, income, traditional or non-traditional status, as well as others. The degree of social integration, or the extent to which the student feels connected to the

university community, was also an important factor for retaining students. Of those students who left their higher education institution, 28.1 percent reported low social integration, compared with only 14.6 percent who claimed high social integration.

This aspect is especially important for students of color at predominantly white universities. Students who report a great deal of discrimination or a lack of social integration with the campus community may decide to leave the university all together and since these students are frequently a numeric minority as well, it may be even more challenging to find meaningful ties at the university. “The difficulty that some institutions have in attracting a talented and diverse student body may have much to do with Latino and African American students perceptions that they will not find needed support for learning and an institutional climate that welcomes racial/ethnic diversity” (Hurtado 2002, 127). This was certainly the case for many students that I talked to in this study.

The same NCES (U.S. Department of Education 2003) report also indicates that of the students leaving their college or university before finishing their degree, 13.6 percent of those who left public schools were Hispanic and of those that left private schools, 23.8 percent were Hispanic, compared to 19.6 percent (public) and 19.2 percent (private) for whites. At public institutions therefore, a greater percentage of those who left were white than were Hispanic, while at private schools this pattern was reversed. Other variables that are often correlated with race, for example income and parental education, also had a measurable impact on attrition.

Black students who began at public 4-year institutions were more likely than their Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander peers to leave within 3 academic

years...Those [students] from higher income families were less likely than those from lower income families to leave within 3 years of first enrollment. For example, 24 percent of students from the lowest income quartile left, while 15 percent of those from the highest income quartile did so. Also, students whose parents did not go to college were more likely than those whose parents did attend college to leave without a credential within 3 years of beginning their postsecondary education (25 versus 15 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics," Short-term Enrollment in Postsecondary Education Student Background and Institutional Differences in Reasons for Early Departure, 1996–98", pg. 9).

The focus of this attrition study is not intended to specifically study students of color and their experiences with discrimination at the university level, but instead discusses overall trends in retention. What it does indicate is that there is a pattern at work, in that students of color are more likely than whites to depart their university without a degree. The researchers considered a number of factors that would explain why students as a whole leave the university, however, experiences of racism and discrimination are not among the considerations for why students of color do not persist. Explanations like this are typical in social science research about racial disparities in education. Rather than focusing on structural causes of differential achievement or attrition rates or enrollment, attention is turned to family (Roscigno 1998), socioeconomic variables (Lareau 1987; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976), community characteristics (Keller 1988-1989), or oddly, even genetics (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). "The problems faced by students of color in education are often said to be located in the students themselves, their families, or their communities" (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996, 4). My research will go beyond explanations that focus wholly on the characteristics of the students or their families, but will instead examine how racist ideologies are at play.

## White Racism and Discrimination

I was returning videos to Blockbuster and as I was walking down the street, somebody said “Wetback, go home!” as they were driving by. Also, the police officers down there. I can remember our friends, we were, we weren’t fighting we were actually just wrestling, but the people downstairs called the cops on us because they thought we were fighting. And the police officer came. . . And the cop’s like “Oh what do you we have here?” And then my friend Hefner, which he happened to be white, and when he came, the cops like “Oh, well what’s going on here? You know, are these guys roughing you up?” He’s like “No, no, we’re just having fun, you know whatever. Everything’s okay. ” He’s like “Alright, I leave everything up to you.” And then the officer left. (What would have happened if he hadn’t showed up?) Uh, I wouldn’t be in the [military] right now. I would have gotten arrested and put in jail. And then I would have had to tell my bosses “Oh I’m in jail.” Southwest University Male 26

This is one of many examples of white racism that students experienced both on and off campus. In this particular instance, the student shares two experiences; one where he was called a racial epithet while running a simple errand. Another involved being treated like a criminal by the police, though nothing criminal was going on. In fact, he was only protected from a negative situation, because the police officer took the word of a white friend who happened to come by. The officer assumed that the white person was being “roughed up” by this student and his friend. Additionally, the white student was automatically seen as a trustworthy and credible source of information. Here in one comment we see multiple forms of white racism and discrimination, showing the saliency of discrimination and racism for students of color.

### *Systemic Racism*

In this study, I have utilized Feagin’s theory of systemic racism in order to analyze the experiences of Latino students with white racism. Racism is not just individual actors and their personal beliefs about other groups. It is goes beyond that.

“From the beginning, this term *racism* was intended to denote a *system* of racialized oppression. A systemic perspective on racism directs us to pay attention to the particular social settings surrounding and generating racial discrimination and other forms of racial oppression...there are literally hundreds of thousands of social settings in which discrimination or other racial oppression is imposed regularly on African Americans and other Americans of color” (Feagin and McKinney 2003, 18). Individual actors operate in the context of a system of racism, which occurs at the individual, institutional, and societal levels all at once. This dynamic informs this research.

#### *White Racial Frame*

A key aspect of this theory is the white racial frame, which is:

an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate. This white racial frame generates closely associated, recurring, and habitual discriminatory actions. The frame and associated discriminatory actions are consciously and unconsciously expressed in the routine operation of racist institutions of this society. (Feagin 2006, 25)

Because of its foundational nature, racism in the United States permeates many aspects of our interactions. It shapes how we understand others, as well as ourselves.

Additionally, this frame becomes normative for all members of society, meaning people of color are also not immune from adopting this way of thinking or behaving. The white standard becomes the standard for everyone.

#### *Assimilation*

Related to this is the concept of assimilation. This theory of adaptation was and is a popular choice in understanding race relations. According to Park and Burgess, assimilation is “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons or groups

acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park and Burgess 1924, 735). They used this theory to explain the process that immigrants to the United States went through in order to adapt to their new society. Milton Gordon (1964) added to this perspective by identifying various stages of assimilation. He also noted that new groups coming into the United States were expected to conform to the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture (Feagin and Feagin 2003). Assimilation is often a one-way process, with minority groups adopting the majority culture, while the majority culture remains virtually unchanged. Though this theory is often symbolized by the idea of the melting pot, in practice, only certain groups, i.e. minority groups, are expected to melt. This phenomenon continues to be the expectation of whites.

The word “assimilate,” however, does not capture the everyday reality of pressure-cooker-type demands on individuals to conform to that white environment and white folkways. There is often no choice for those who are not white but to more or less accept, mostly emulate, and even parrot the prevailing white folkways, including the white-generated negative images of racial outgroups, usually including one’s own group. People of color constantly resist these pressures for conformity, but most have to accept and adapt to some extent just to survive in a white-controlled society (Feagin 2006, 47).

Assimilation is a way for whites to maintain their dominance in society by enforcing the adaptation of non-whites to white norms. As Feagin points out and as we will see throughout this analysis, conforming to the white racial frame becomes a method of surviving in this society. What that means at times is that people of color will express, or perhaps even internalize, aspects of the frame that reinforce negativity about their own group and others. It can also be a mechanism that people of color can use to

avoid white racism and discrimination. “Sociologist Nestor Rodriguez has noted a parallel phenomenon of whiteness pressures among Latinos. Some of the latter, especially those up the income ladder, ‘share this experience, and some do it in a state of denial, that is, they deny the reality of anti-Latino bias, discrimination and prejudices around them. And they push their children into an Anglo-like experience’” (Feagin 2000, 228). Students I spoke with felt pressure from whites, other Latinos, and the institution of higher education to conform to white folkways. Some resisted it, though others saw it as normative.

### *Discrimination*

Unlike other studies about Latino student experiences on college campuses, my study has racism and discrimination as its focus. Discrimination is racism set into motion. “*Discrimination* thus involves *actions*, as well as one or more *discriminators* and one or more *targets*...Broadly viewed, the system of antiblack discrimination includes (1) the motivations of the discriminator, such as stereotyping and prejudice, (2) the discriminatory actions, (3) the costs and benefits of discrimination, (4) the immediate social-institutional context, and (5) the surrounding community, societal, and global contexts” (Feagin and McKinney 2003, 18). Discrimination within the white racist frame occurs at many different levels. It is present in the day-to-day interactions between individuals, as well as the practices of institutions. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) found many types of discrimination that African Americans faced at predominantly white universities. It ranged from a racist atmosphere that students of

color can feel without anything specific actually happening to overt racist acts (being graded differently because of one's race and so on.)

Feagin, Vera, and Imani's (1996) findings for African Americans are also relevant for Latinos at predominantly white universities. One pattern found in the interviews conducted with African American students was the idea of racialized space. Respondents talked about incidents when they were made to feel as though they were intruding in various aspects of campus life, though they had just as much right to be there as a white student. The Latinos that I spoke with encountered racialized spaces on their campuses in a variety of ways. Another example used by Feagin, Vera, and Imani was the representation of African American students in State University's yearbook. In general, students of color were not found in this documentation of the university, indicating that their presence and involvement is not expected or valued. Latinos were underrepresented at the universities in a number of ways, including on the faculty, in symbolic ways, and in the curriculum.

Other types of discrimination faced by students of color includes rude treatment from fellow students or faculty and staff; being ignored and/or avoided; being treated as a representative for their entire race (tokenism); whites questioning their credentials or abilities; dealing with whites lack of knowledge about other cultures, as well as stereotypes about their group based on the white racist framework; facing white denial of racism as a continuing issue for students of color; pressure to assimilate; feelings of heightened visibility on and near campus due to their race; and being targeted with racist



epithets or violence. Additionally, institutional racism is seen by students as a major obstacle to their success at the university.

Again, I would just go back to the need to deal with institutional racism. I think that if we don't address that in this campus; I think there could be another uprising from Latino students or black students, especially since black numbers have dropped drastically. They are graduating though. But they are still dropping. There's not this, whatever recruitment that there has been in the past. I think the same would go for Native American students, who are like 1 or 2 percent of the population of this campus. I think this school needs to become culturally sensitive. And I think it's not. I think it's just looking at dollar signs and reputation again. . . Oh they toot their horns all the time about their [inaudible] when it comes to saying that this is a diverse school. But it's not going to be a diverse much longer if you continue the way you do. If you continue to cut off the access, you will have excellence, but you will have costs. It will have cost you, the issue of not having diversity on this campus. Midwest University Female 24

We hear the consequences of universities giving only surface level credence to diversity and students of color. This student has noticed enrollment decreasing at her school for students of color. She points out that institutional racism leads to a great deal of frustration for students of color and that if universities do not seriously address the needs of students of color, the result will be a complete lack of diversity on their campuses. She notes the lack of sincerity when universities claim to value students of color, but then do not follow that up with actual change.

### **Major Predictions**

Using the systemic racism framework, these are some of the major predictions that began this research:

- Contrary to the popular belief that racism and discrimination are no longer major issues in today's society, Latino students will face racism and discrimination on both the individual and institutional levels.

- The proportion of Latino students at a university or in the state will not affect whether or not Latinos face discrimination.
- Students who are less identifiable as Latinos and more able to pass as white will face less discrimination.
- Racism has an impact on how students view their university culture and their satisfaction at the university.
- Because of the systemic nature of racism, Latinos may also adopt white beliefs about their group, other groups, and the racial order in society.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen so far, there are a number of disparities when looking at how the education system educates people of color compared to whites. Attainment for Latinos continues to be lower than that of whites in terms of enrollment and degree attainment. The continuing significance of white racism is evident in the experiences of the students we have heard from so far, as well as the voices to come. There is an implication that if universities are not willing to change and adapt, rather than expecting students of color to adapt, that they will soon be even whiter places than they already are. This research will address a number of issues that Latinos face when they negotiate the higher education system, as well as life off-campus. Before I get to the analysis, I will first review briefly the history of Latinos in the United States as well as the literature on education (Chapter II), discuss my theoretical perspective in greater detail (Chapter III), and then will review the methodology utilized in this study (Chapter IV).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a chance for exploitation on an immense scale for inordinate profit...This chance lies in the exploitation of darker peoples. It is here that the golden hand beckons. Here are no labor unions or votes or questioning onlookers or inconvenient consciences. These men may be used down to the very bone, and shot and maimed in 'punitive' expeditions when they revolt. In these dark lands 'industrial development' may repeat in exaggerated form every horror of the industrial history of Europe, from slavery and rape to disease and maiming, with only one test of success, —dividends! (Du Bois 2003, 67).

#### **Historical Context**

There is a long history of racism and discrimination in the United States. Du Bois speaks of the exploitation of people of color, which has been an enduring element of racial oppression since the founding of the United States. Though many groups have suffered ill-treatment during their tenure in this country, the way that this experience has played out is substantially different. For people of color especially, their status as a racial minority relegated them to the bottom of the social status hierarchy. They were thought of in terms of what could be stolen from them, "used down to the very bone." In order to get a better sense of the discrimination faced by Latinos, I will provide some information on the historical context of racism and discrimination that this group has faced. This analysis will be focused on Mexican Americans, recognizing that other Latino groups have had different experiences in the United States.

Mexican Americans have had a long history in the United States and "in fact, have lived 'here' since before there was a Mexico or a United States. And they have

been immigrating to this country almost since its inception” (Gonzalez 2000, 96). Their first encounters with whites in the United States were framed by conquest and theft. Whites seeking land and, importantly for some, seeking reprieve from anti-slavery laws, encroached westward. When they did this, they encountered, to their surprise, people...people who had lived on the land since before whites arrived on the continent. Seeing Mexicans as an impediment to white progress, and bolstered by the ideals of “Manifest Destiny,” whites soon cheated and stole land from Mexicans for their own gain. “In New Mexico alone, at least two million acres of privately owned land were lost between 1854 and 1930. Those who lost their land often became landless laborers or sharecroppers on land formerly owned by Mexicans or Mexican Americans—in some cases land that had been owned by their ancestors” (Feagin 2000, 218). If Mexicans attempted to resist this invasion, they faced violence and lynchings and were often labeled as bandits or outlaws, images that continue to shape white ideas about this group today (Gonzalez 2000).

Anglo conquest displaced thousands of people in the South and Southwest. “Whole communities were driven from the towns of Austin, Seguin, and Uvalde. A scant six years after Texas independence, thirteen Anglos had gobbled up 1.3 million acres in ‘legal’ sales from 358 Mexican landowners” (Gonzalez 2000, 100). Within the 20 years between 1850 and 1870, property went from being fairly evenly divided between whites and Mexican Americans to *tejanos* possessing only 10 percent of wealth while occupying a bigger proportion of the population (Gonzalez 2000, 102). This dispossession of land led to further inequalities for Mexican Americans, as well as their

continued exploitation by whites. Though Mexican Americans were not legally segregated under Jim Crow, “much informal discrimination targeted Mexican Americans, especially those who were dark skinned and of substantial African or Native American ancestry. In numerous towns and cities Mexican Americans faced blatant discrimination and overt segregation in employment, housing, schools, and public accommodations” (Feagin 2000, 218). Mexican Americans also encountered discrimination due to language. Though there is no official language, white Americans were, and still are, threatened by the use of Spanish, so much so that students have been punished for using Spanish in school, English-only movements (Blanton 2004) and employees have been fired for using it at work (Feagin 2000).

Gonzalez compares the segregation of the Southwest in the 1920s to the apartheid of South Africa, stating that “Mexicans comprised more than 90 percent of its population, but the white minority controlled most of the land and all the political power” (Gonzalez 2000, 102). Additionally, Blauner points out that as land was stolen from them, Mexican Americans were left in “a status little above peonage,” while whites profited exponentially (Blauner 2001, 52). Mexican Americans were also disenfranchised and thus blocked from having significant political power, allowing whites to rule without conflict. The implementation of the poll tax in Texas was especially devastating for poor and minority voters. “At the height of the People’s Party in 1896, for instance, its candidate for governor of Texas carried 44 percent of the vote, with an amazing 88 percent of voting-age adults going to the polls. But after the poll tax became law, turnout in Texas elections plummeted by as much as two-thirds and it failed

to reach higher than 40 percent for the first half of the twentieth century. Poor whites, blacks, and Mexicans simply could not afford a tax that in some cases equaled almost 30 percent of the average weekly factory wage in the South.” (Gonzalez 2000, 170).

Remarkably, this tax was not repealed until the mid-1960s!

Like African Americans, Mexican Americans were in a vulnerable position in the labor market. When the economy was doing well or labor was in short supply, they were welcomed as inexpensive agricultural labor. When economic crisis hit the nation, it hit Mexican Americans especially hard. “Once the Great Depression hit and unemployment surged among whites, though, not even Mexicans who spoke fluent English escaped the anti-immigrant hysteria. More than 500,000 were forcibly deported during the 1930s, among them many who were U.S. citizens” (Gonzalez 2000, 103). While blacks faced unemployment and a lack of sufficient relief during this time, which was undoubtedly difficult, Mexican Americans were forcibly removed from the United States regardless of their citizenship status. Though Mexicans have been living in the United States since before it was an actual country, they are thought to have immigrant status by whites, who then use such a status to deport this group at will. The Great Depression was not the first, nor the only time, that such measures were taken by whites against Mexican Americans.

When the onset of World War II brought a labor shortage, the U.S. government changed its tune regarding Mexican immigration. The *Bracero* program was an arrangement that the United States made with Mexico, which allowed Mexican workers to migrate under the auspices of temporary, seasonal employment. “As many as 100,000

Mexicans a year were soon being contracted to work here,” and many more came illegally under this program (Gonzalez 2000, 103). Many Mexican American citizens also served in the war. Like African Americans, these veterans, numbering at more than 375,000, returned home to American racism and discrimination (Gonzalez 2000, 103-104). However, this ill-treatment led to political activism for Mexican Americans that will be discussed more fully later on.

The U.S. government retained a schizophrenic relationship with its neighbor to the South. Once again, Mexican Americans were targeted and deported by the government due to economic recession. “In July 1954, the federal government unleashed one of the darkest periods in immigrant history—‘Operation Wetback.’ Brutal dragnets were conducted in hundreds of Mexican neighborhoods as migrants were summarily thrown into jails, herded into trucks or trains, then shipped back to Mexico. Many of those abducted were American citizens of Mexican descent. The government, ignoring all due process, deported between 1 and 2 million people in a few short months. As soon as the recession ended, however, the demand for Mexican labor picked up again and the *bracero* program was resuscitated” (Gonzalez 2000, 203). Even with the establishment of legal rights through citizenship, this did not prevent the government from treating Mexican Americans like second-class citizens and maintaining a fair-weather relationship (at best) with Mexico with the exclusive purpose of benefiting the United States. Actions like this led to increased political participation and protests from Mexican Americans.

Another key part of the Mexican American experience in the United States has to do with racial categorization. From the 1930s and 1940s until the 1970s, Mexican Americans were counted as white in the U.S. Census (Snipp 2003). Though on the surface, this may seem beneficial, it actually resulted in Mexicans being segregated and an overestimation of their economic and social standing. Specifically, whites wanting to avoid the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* used this census distinction in order to avoid integration. By placing “white” Mexican Americans in schools with blacks, integration could be achieved. In 1973, Latino lobbying for separate categorization paid off with the *Keyes* case.

The resolution came in the *Keyes* case, the Denver desegregation case decided in 1973. The decision in this case, filed by blacks, required taking a position on the status of Mexican Americans. Denver had significant populations of blacks, Anglos, and Hispanics, so the court had either to lump the Hispanics in with Anglos or recognize Hispanics as a separate group. The latter tack would lead to the conclusion that Hispanics had also been illegally segregated and require a plan to desegregate them also. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that Mexican Americans were an identifiable minority group and constitutionally entitled to recognition as such for desegregation purposes (*Keyes v. School District Number One, Denver, Colorado*, 1973). School officials in systems found to be unconstitutionally segregated could not treat Hispanics as whites for the purposes of desegregating schools (Meier and Stewart 1991, 70).

This reversal in policy was significant in that it forced whites to develop plans that would be more effective in desegregating schools and represented a political victory for Mexican Americans.

What is often forgotten is the fact that the history of Mexican Americans in the United States is a longer one than that of whites. “It is sometimes difficult for white Americans to understand how deep the roots of Mexican Americans are in that part of



the country. Most whites who live in the region, after all, only arrived there during the last fifty years...Farm-worker leader Cesar Chavez's family, for instance, moved to Arizona in 1880, long before it was a state" (Gonzalez 2000, 107). Comparatively, whites are relatively recent migrants to an area that was stolen from people who had inhabited it for generations.

### **Current Conditions**

This historical pattern of white domination laid the foundation for the inequalities that currently exist today. Mexican Americans lag behind whites in a number of ways in contemporary society.

Economically, Mexican Americans have one of the highest rates of poverty, second to African Americans. Saenz and Morales found using Census data that the poverty rate for African Americans was 25%. For native-born Mexicans the rate was lower than blacks at 21.6% and for foreign-born Mexicans it exceeded blacks at 25%! (Saenz and Morales 2005, 181). There is some variation in terms of whether or not Mexican Americans are first-generation, poor immigrants or if they have been in the United States for a longer period of time. "Foreign-born Mexicans have by far the lowest level of education, with less than 1 in 20 having a college diploma. Furthermore, five other groups have fewer than one in five of their members 25-44 years of age who are college graduates: native-born American Indians (11.9%), native-born Puerto Ricans (13.7%), native-born Mexicans (13.8%), native-born African Americans (14.4%), and native-born Vietnamese (18.9%)" (Saenz and Morales 2005, 180-181). Clearly, native-born Mexicans have a long road ahead of them in terms of reaching parity with whites

regarding education. Saenz and Morales also demonstrate that wages for Latinos (and blacks) are lower than whites (Saenz and Morales 2005)

Mexican Americans have faced discrimination because of language and are expected to conform to white standards of English. “Enforced adaptation to the English language not only marked the movement of early English colonizers across the lands of conquest, but also marks today—in attacks on black English and on Spanish—similar attempts to maintain white cultural dominance over those long subordinated” (Feagin 2000, 49). Controlling language is a way that whites attempt to control and dominate Latinos and is an especially concerning issue today. Farmer’s Branch, Texas was the first town in the state to attempt to create anti-immigration policies, which included a proposal for making the official language of the town English-only, meaning that documents related to leasing an apartment could only be written in English (<http://www.dallasnews.com>).

As the previous example shows, immigration is a very salient issue in the United States. Current U.S. Immigration policy is focused on three preference categories: “family-sponsored, employment-based, and ‘diversity’ immigrants” (Brown and Bean 2005, 365). The relaxation in immigration policy over the last 40-50 years has resulted in tremendous increases in immigration. “In the decade of the 1990s (1991-2000), America admitted more legal immigrants than in any previous decade. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the net total was 9.1 million, not counting illegals. The highest previous decade was almost a full century earlier, 1901-1910, when the total was almost the same, 8.8 million” (Wattenburg 2004, 73). Though this leads to

concerns from current nativist “thinkers,” Wattenburg points out that there are fewer foreign born people in the United States today than there were in the early part of the century, where in 1910, 34 percent of the population was considered foreign stock versus 21 percent today (Wattenburg 2004, 73-74). Regardless, bilingualism and English-only laws continue to be concerns in the United States, especially of the right-wing, as well as discussions about patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border, building barriers to prevent people from crossing, and making the citizenship process more complicated.

Gonzalez rightly points out that the situation in Mexico is one of despair and poverty due to the inequality of global capitalism. “We often forget that Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world. It has 95 million residents, a high birth rate, and desperate poverty. A disturbing portion of its national wealth flows outside its borders each day and into the pockets of Wall Street shareholders. So much of that wealth has been siphoned off in recent years that the Mexican economy finds it increasingly difficult to feed and clothes its population. If these conditions do not change, Mexico will remain an inexhaustible source of migrants to the United States” (Gonzalez 2000, 96-97). Unless the hierarchy of wealth is somehow changed, it is likely that Mexico and other Latin American countries will remain impoverished compared to their developed neighbor to the North.

Because of this, the policies that the United States government has used to curb immigration, particularly undocumented immigration, have been mostly ineffective. Limiting visas only changes whether immigration will be documented or undocumented (Massey and Espinosa 1997, 975). Employer sanctions and border apprehensions

decrease repeat trips and “raise the odds of initial undocumented migration and have no effect on the odds that undocumented migrants already in the United States will return to Mexico” (Massey and Espinosa 1997, 990). Additionally, cutting off social services will just result in a less well-off group of undocumented migrants. Since these seem to be the only measures that politicians are willing to entertain, it is likely that immigration rates will be maintained or will continue to increase.

What is unknown and harder to ascertain are the effects of undocumented immigrants on the population. “The Urban Institute estimates there are 9.3 million illegal immigrants in America, representing 26 percent of the total foreign-born population. Mexicans make up more than half the illegals (5.3 million)...About 2.2 million illegals (23 percent) hail from other Latin American countries. Thus about three-quarters of the illegals are from Latin America” (Wattenburg 2004, 200). This is a significant number of people in our population that we have relatively little information about.

One reason that it is difficult to know the exact number of illegal immigrants has to do with the mobility of the illegal immigrant population. Massey and Singer (1995) find that of all the illegal entries to the United States made by illegal, undocumented workers over the past 25 years, about 86 percent of them were offset by departures from the United States. In other words, this is a mobile population of people with a high rate of turnover. It is likely that the people we are counting at any given point in time may not continue residence in the United States for long periods of time.

Another possible reason that it is difficult to count illegal immigrants has to do with the risks that the immigrants themselves would be taking by self-identifying as an illegal immigrant. “The result [of right-wing views] was a rash of 1996 immigration laws that have led to a virtual militarization of our border with Mexico, sharp reductions in legal immigration quotas, skyrocketing fees and other economic obstacles for those applying for legal residency or citizenship, and accelerated deportation procedures for noncitizens convicted of even the most minimal crimes” (Gonzalez 2000, 195). The policies in place to reduce illegal immigration are not only ineffective, but they also stymie our ability to ascertain the exact number of illegal immigrants. When the decision is between remaining under the radar or the possibility of getting deported, the answer is clear.

Their undocumented status means illegal immigrants are not eligible for many of the basic rights that American citizens are granted, which also results in a data void for researchers. “Illegals often cannot get health insurance. The new welfare laws make it difficult for them to get ‘the helping hand’ (temporarily, while looking for a job.) They have difficulty enrolling in government-sponsored English-language courses. They can’t vote. It is difficult for them to participate in their communities” (Wattenburg 2004, 200-201). This lack of access is not only inconvenient for social scientists, who might be able to obtain data about illegal immigrants from voter registration cards or school enrollment; but it also puts illegal immigrants in a precarious position while they are in the United States. Social services, representation, legal protection, education, and upward mobility are all extremely limited, if available at all. On top of that, when labor

demands decrease, corporations can easily fire or raid this vulnerable population of their workforce.

The impacts of illegal immigrants on the population are not completely known. Because this group is not accurately enumerated, we have little way of knowing what the social conditions for these groups are. What we can be sure of is that these groups will continue to face inequalities in the U.S. society, which could eventually put strain on our social institutions. “In the shadows of a history of ascriptive democracy, national but especially local interests are not well served by muffling the voices of a growing share of the U.S. population...More significant, however, is that concerns about fairness in governance will become more discordant with the principles of *equity* and *inclusion* as long as entire communities remain voiceless in decisions that govern their life options and those of their children” (Tienda 2002, 607). In a political system that prides itself on its democracy, there is something amiss when groups of people are counted in during apportionment and then not given a vote. The lack of political power for illegal immigrants can have ramifications for their future, as well as that of their children and families.

On the flip side, for Mexican American citizens, political involvement has increased in the last 20 years. “Between 1976 and 1996, Hispanic voter registration in the United States increased 164 percent...voter turn-out among Hispanics grew by 135%” (Gonzalez 2000, 168). Policies targeted at Latinos, especially those that focus on English-only language policies and anti-immigrant initiatives have mobilized this group to political action (Gonzalez 2000, 168). Representation, especially in states where

Mexican Americans make up a significant proportion of the population, has increased.

“The handful of victories during the early 1960s opened the gates for the modern Hispanic political movement. At the time De la Garza was elected, *tejanos* held only 31 of 3,300 elected positions in the state and only 5 of 11,800 appointed posts. By 1994, just three decades later, the number of Texas Hispanic officeholders skyrocketed to 2,215” (Gonzalez 2000, 172). As Mexican Americans become an even larger proportion of the population, it will be interesting to see if their political representation continues to increase. The slant of conservative policy makers had resulted in a racial climate in America that is vehemently anti-immigrant. Especially concerning for whites are illegal immigrants and concern has increased especially after the 9/11 terrorist acts (Wattenberg 2004).

Mexican Americans have a history of political resistance to white discrimination and racism. For example, the League of United Latin American Citizens was one of first groups to organize in order to improve the conditions for Latinos. Though its philosophy was rooted in assimilation and Americanization, which was especially beneficial for middle-class Latinos yearning to be seen as white (Jewell forthcoming), this group was resisting the idea that Mexican Americans could not be educated and did not deserve equal standing with whites (Gonzalez 2000, 103). In the 1960s, Mexican American youth, especially, reidentified themselves as Chicanos. “The moniker became a way for young people to connect culturally with the Mexican homeland, in much the same way that the change from ‘Negro’ to ‘black’ had affected the civil rights movement in the South” (Gonzalez 2000, 105).

A number of new organizations surfaced as well, mostly led by the lower-class and young people. These organizations were more radical than the older organizations, which were viewed as being “too concerned with appearing to be respectable and reasonable to Anglo society” (Gonzalez 2000, 174). Instead, groups like Mexican American Youth Organization, Raza Unida Party, Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, the Brown Berets, La Raza Unida, the Alianza, the United Farm Workers, the Young Lords, Los Siete de La Raza, Crusade for Justice, Movimiento Pro Independencia, MECHA, August Twenty-ninth Movement and sought more radical changes (Gonzalez 2000).

Though both African Americans and Mexican Americans were exploited, the conditions of slavery had a long-lasting impact for African Americans that Mexican Americans did not experience. Though the experiences of Mexican Americans cannot be diminished in this comparison, slavery and the near-slavery of legal segregation resulted in a fundamentally different America for blacks.

Mexican Americans had greater ties to resources and their familial and cultural ties than blacks which can explain some of the differences that exist.

“In some ways Mexican Americans have somewhat greater resources, including the resource of being close to their home country...Mexican, other Latino, and Asian immigrants who have come to the United States over the last century or so have usually had the ability, if they wish, to maintain a strong identity with and link to the home country. These ties have provided family and moral support, and sometimes monetary aid, in the face of racist barriers established by whites. For these immigrants and their descendents the home ties have generally not been destroyed by centuries of oppression, as they have been for most black Americans. In addition, from the 1850s to the 1920s Mexicans on both sides of the border had a history of armed struggles against whites, struggles that have



inspired later generations to fight only anti-Mexican discrimination (Feagin 2000, 219).

This is an important distinction, and could explain why in some respects, Mexican Americans are faring somewhat better than African Americans. However, as my research will show, Latinos are not exempt from experiencing racism and discrimination regardless of these extra resources and their historical experience in the United States. Next I will focus on literature on racism and discrimination in higher education. To date, there is not a great deal of research on the experiences of Latinos in higher education. My research will be contributing to this literature by showing the day-to-day, as well as the institutional discrimination that Latinos face on university campuses, as well as off-campus.

### **Studies on Students of Color in Higher Education**

An article by Loo and Rolison (1986) demonstrates some support for the idea that students of color have a much different college experience than white students attending the same institutions. Though they do find some evidence of differential treatment, they also claim that at this particular school “the alienation felt by minority students was neither due to difficulties in making friends nor to racial hostility from whites...In fact, white students at this university were more supportive of increasing the representation of ethnic minority students on campus than white college students nationally” (Loo and Rolison 1986, 69). They theorize that perhaps the ethnic demography of the state has something to do with whether or not whites are more or less tolerant of students of color at their schools, the “political persuasion of the student

body, a factor influenced by the educational philosophy and reputation of the institution” (70), or, borrowing from Blalock (1967), the relative size of the minority group at the school. “As the minority percentage increases, therefore, we would expect to find increasing discriminatory behavior” (Loo and Rolison 1986, 71). Though they offer some valuable insights into how universities can better support students of color, they do not focus on white racism and the day-to-day discrimination that these students encounter on college campuses. Their theory about the relative minority group size is also quite different from one elaborated later on by Hurtado (2002), pointing to an interesting area that needs more attention in the literature.

Nora and Cabrera (1996) use survey data to determine how important prejudice and discrimination are in how students of color adjust to college. They sampled students at one university in the Midwest and found that though the minority students were more likely to report perceptions of racial hostility on campus and experience discrimination, “perceptions of discrimination were found to exert at most an indirect effect on their decisions to persist...It is believed that perhaps minorities have become more accustomed to discriminatory acts on campuses and that they have subsequently become more hardened to the pressures that would otherwise push students away from persisting in college” (Nora and Cabrera 1996, 141). While this study also provides evidence that students of color experience racism and discrimination, or at least perceive greater levels of discrimination than whites, it underestimates the impact that white racism can have. First, it is difficult to assess racism and prejudice using survey data alone and secondly they sample students who were still enrolled in the school.

Racism is a very complex phenomenon that can involve a variety of discriminatory actions and attitudes. It is hard to get to the depth of racist beliefs using only survey methodology. For example, Schuman et al. (1997) used survey data exclusively to make the claim that whites are more racially tolerant than they were in the past and therefore racism is no longer a major societal concern. What they failed to take into account is the changing nature of racism and that though whites are less overtly racist now; they still express racist views in color-blind ways, as shown in the research of Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Picca and Feagin (2007). Picca and Feagin found that “whites tend to have ‘two faces’ when it comes to their racial views, commentaries, and actions. They frequently present themselves as innocent of racism in the frontstage, indeed as ‘colorblind’ even as they clearly show their racist framing of the world in their backstage comments, emotions, and actions” (Picca and Feagin 2007, 19). This “two-faced” nature of white racism makes it more complicated to observe, which could lead to the false impression that racism and discrimination is obsolete. Additionally, respondents can be influenced the race of the interviewer, social desirability effects, and the order in which questions are asked. Importantly, how respondents interpret the meanings of questions can have an impact on their responses. Being able to probe for more information and to allow respondents to talk about their perceptions of what racism involves (versus choosing responses provided by an interviewer), allows for a more in-depth picture of what is actually occurring.

One question that Nora and Cabrera’s study raises is whether their results would be different had they included students did not persist. Their sample only included

students who were still enrolled at the university, so could be skewed towards continuing students. What about the students that did not persist? Perhaps those that did not persist experienced a great deal of racism and decided to remove themselves from the university. While the correlation is merely speculative, I suggest that it is problematic to make the claim that racism does not impact students' decisions to drop out without talking to students who have, in fact, left the university. In fact, Hurtado (2002) found that students' perceptions of racism had an impact on their decisions to attend or remain at a higher education institution.

Padilla's (1997) book is one of the few that confronts problems that Latino students encounter in higher education. His focus is on individual student identity development and the possibility of education to liberate students in their thinking about the oppression that Latino students face. "I was observing as students began to examine their attitudes and practices more critically. They were recognizing more and more the importance of defining who they are in their own terms; they were learning to shape their new identity" (Padilla 1997, 18). Education is seen as a tool for liberation, which it certainly can be. Liberation education is a step in the right direction and this research provides some valuable insights about what Latino students experience adding to the meager literature on this group. Freire eloquently describes the conflict that students of color often encounter while living in a racist society, as well as the importance of the kind of education that Padilla is advocating in his research.

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being...They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the

oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account (Freire 1993, p. 30).

The education system must attempt to understand the dilemmas that students of color face in their own identity development. However, by concentrating solely on this aspect of education, the focus is on individual students and their transformation, rather than on the system of racism that creates inequality in the first place. This puts the onus on exceptional individual students to come to self-awareness in order to facilitate change. I do not deny the importance of individual agency, but it is equally important to recognize that the dominant structure must be altered in order for equality to be realized. In order to get closer to that structure, it is necessary to look for patterns of how white racism continues to impact students of color.

Amanda Lewis's (2005) work has shown that students in elementary schools are often treated differently because of their race and that this impacts their success in a variety of ways. She found that racial boundaries are very relevant in elementary schools, regardless of the proportion of students of color. Often students of color were disciplined more harshly, targeted more often for conduct issues, or completely ignored in the classroom. Teachers of color were often heavily burdened by the need to defend students of color from their white colleagues. Whites were also likely to deny the existence of racism in their schools or to give lip-service to their diversity issues by

focusing on it only in very superficial ways. She found that the education system itself reproduces racial inequalities. Many of the things she found to be true in elementary schools are also found in higher education.

My research explores how systemic white racism impacts the student experience for Latinos. My research acknowledges that racism and discrimination goes beyond individual identity formation and is systemic.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Broadly, how does systemic racism and the white racist framework operate for Latino students? What types of racism and discrimination do they encounter on both the individual-level as well as the institutional-level?
2. Does the proportion of Latino students at an institution impact the degree of racism or discrimination that students face? Are white students really more accepting of students of color when there are more students of color enrolled?
3. Do students still face discrimination and racism when attending a university that is not predominantly white?
4. Do students experience discrimination off-campus as well and what does that involve?

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

“Slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that ‘darkies’ are born beasts of burden for white folk. It were silly to think otherwise, cries the cultured world, with stronger and shriller accord. The supporting arguments grow and twist themselves in the mouths of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer, and missionary. Darker peoples are dark in mind as well as in body of dark, uncertain, and imperfect descent; of frailer, cheaper stuff; they are cowards in the face of mausers and maxims; they have no feelings, aspirations, and loves; they are fools, illogical idiots,—‘half devil and half-child’” (Du Bois 2003, 65-66).

This quote from Du Bois demonstrates the socially constructed nature of race (“white culture is evolving the theory”), the significance of stereotypes (“of frailer, cheaper stuff; they are cowards...they have no feelings...they are fools”), the systemic nature of racism (“in the mouths of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler...”), and how all of this contributes to discrimination (“born beasts of burden for white folk”). Du Bois points out that the concept of race as indicating social meaning is something that was invented, and more specifically, something that was invented by those in power to maintain their status on the top of the racial hierarchy. Words like race, ethnicity, and discrimination have been contested territory and their meanings have changed over time. Despite the somewhat fluid nature of these terms, they remain salient and important in our understanding of inequality.

#### **Racial Group**

The term ‘race’ has transformed a great deal, often depending on the social climate of a particular historical period. Beginning with primarily biological parameters

in order to support the ideas of scientific racism and Eugenics, social scientists now understand race to be a social construct. Indeed, anthropologists have found that there is no genetic, biological basis for the concept of race and that there are more differences within racial groups than between them. With this profound discovery, racial groups were no longer considered fixed categories based on biology.

Cox defines a racial group as “any people who are distinguished, or consider themselves distinguished, in social relations with other peoples, by their physical characteristics” (Cox 1948) and Pierre van den Berghe defined racial groups as “a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics” (van den Berghe 1967). These definitions demonstrate that racial groups may be self-defined or defined by others and that the meaning of race is understood in relation to others. Additionally, van den Berghe makes the point that the particular physical characteristic that is distinguished as meaningful may not be changeable in the individual.

Feagin and Feagin add to this conceptualization of racial group by including the element of hierarchically organized meanings. A racial group is “a social group that persons inside or outside the group have decided is important to single out as inferior or superior, typically on the basis of real or alleged physical characteristics subjectively selected” (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 6). In this conceptualization of the word, the fluidity of the term is exposed. Some groups are superior and some are inferior based on characteristics that could be real or imagined. It is important to note that these characteristics are subjective, which indicates that they change over time. For Feagin,



the hierarchical organization of racial groups is rooted in ideological racism, where typically groups that are white are at the top.

Omi and Winant's definition of race also places the meaning of the word in historical context. "Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called 'phenotypes'), selection of these particular human features for the purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process" (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). Central to Omi and Winant's conceptualization is the idea that race is something that changes throughout time. For example, when dealing with the African American race, the U.S. government legalized hypodescent, so that the racial category of a person who had one black parent and one white parent was designated as black. At the same time, for Native Americans, the U.S. government utilized hyperdescent, which meant that a person who was born of a Native American parent and a white parent was considered white. Both categories served government interests at the time, in the former example by denying rights to African Americans under slavery and legal segregation and in the latter by limiting the number of Native Americans who the government was responsible to provide relief for (Snipp 2003). Looking at the transformation of the racial categories on the U.S. Census, as Snipp does, demonstrates Omi and Winant's point that racial formation is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi and Winant 1994, 55).

So, if this term, racial group, is fluid and changes over time and is based on characteristics that can be imagined, is it really all that important? If racial groups are socially constructed, then why do we care about them at all? The reason is that a system of meaning and social organization emerged around these conceptions of race.

According to Bonilla-Silva, “although the racialization of peoples was socially invented and did not override previous forms of social distinction based on class or gender, it did not lead to imaginary relations but generated new forms of human association with definite status differences. After the process of attaching meaning to a ‘people’ is instituted, race becomes a real category of group association and identity” (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 40). In other words, the hierarchy based on racial distinctions shape how we interact with and understand each other and that hierarchy continues to exist even when the meanings of what a particular racial group is, changes. Once these categories come into being, they become real in their consequences. “The fact that race, as with all social categories, is fluid does not mean that it does not become a social fact” Bonilla-Silva 2001, 196).

### **Ethnic Group**

The term ethnic group has been used both broadly and narrowly in terms of categorizing people. Gordon’s definition of an ethnic group is a one distinguished “by race, religion, or national origin” (1964). Pierre van den Berghe claims that ethnic groups are “socially defined but on the basis of cultural criteria” (1967). We can see in both of these definitions that ethnic groups are shaped by culture, are once again socially constructed categories, and that in some definitions race is an element of an ethnic

group. Feagin and Feagin add that an ethnic group is “a group socially distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or national-origin characteristics” (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 8).

Often race and ethnicity are used in ways to negate each other. For example, in the past, the various ethnicities within racial groups were aggregated to only a racial category. “Systems of racial oppression tend to undermine ethnic groups and ethnicity as a principle of social organization...Cultural groups were broken up, in part because it was the more convenient administrative arrangement, in part because traders and planters were aware that tribal fragmentation would reduce the ability of slaves to communicate and resist. With time it became ‘natural’ to treat the bondsmen as a more or less homogenous mass of Africans” (Blauner 2001, 84). Blauner makes the point that especially during slavery, the various ethnic distinctions between Africans were destroyed and Africans were only classified by their race and further suggests that some of the complexity of race relations has to do with the compression of these two terms into one category of race (Blauner 2001, 86)

At the same time, using the term ethnic group, especially in today’s color-blind society, is a way to avoid talking about race. Omi and Winant point out that for a long period of time, social scientists focused mostly on ethnicity in order to explain assimilation and immigration. “Early ethnicity-based theory, considered in the U.S. context, concentrated on problems of migration and ‘culture contact’ (to use Park’s phrase)...the ethnic paradigm definitively dislodged the biologicistic view in what appeared to be a triumph of liberalism” (Omi and Winant 1994, 15). While the

discussion about ethnicity was important, because it undermined the biological explanations for differences and inequality, at the same time the theories coming out of the early Chicago school was reluctant to take into account the different experiences that people of color may have (Omi and Winant 1994, 16). Their theories were based on the white-immigrant experience, which meant there was some expectation that people of color should be able to assimilate into U.S. society as earlier immigrants had, though this was not the case.

### **Stereotyping**

Allport provides a starting point for us to analyze what the term stereotype means in current literature. By his definition a stereotypes “are primarily images within a category invoked by the individual to justify either love-prejudice or hate-prejudice. They play an important part in prejudice but are not the whole story” (Allport 1979, 189). This broad definition does not necessarily have connotations in terms of race and ethnic relations and can be used to justify both positive and negative ideas about someone. An important aspect of Allport’s definition is that stereotypes do not have to be supported by facts and can also be created by overgeneralizing facts (Allport 1979).

“Once formed, they case their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories... A stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category” (Allport 1979, 190-191). After the formation of a stereotype, these ideas are used to shape future interaction. So if a person believes the stereotype that all African Americans eat is fried chicken, then every time they see an African American eating fried chicken, they find

proof of their stereotype. The stereotype is not dispelled if the person sees an African American eating something other than fried chicken. If a person believes that Mexicans are lazy, then this stereotypes justifies the fact that Mexicans do not achieve the same levels of education or social status as whites.

However, stereotypes do not just exist at the individual level. Bonilla-Silva points out that stereotypes are a part of the ideology of the racialized structure of the social system.

These images ultimately indicate—although in distorted ways—and justify the stereotyped group’s position in a society. Stereotypes may originate out of  
 (1) material realities or conditions endured by the group  
 (2) genuine ignorance about the group, or  
 (3) rigid, distorted views on the group’s physical, cultural, or moral nature. Once they emerge, however, stereotypes must relate—although not necessarily fit perfectly—to the group’s true social position in a racialized system if they are to perform their ideological function...Stereotypes are reproduced because they reflect a group’s distinct position and status in society (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 47).

Stereotypes may originate from different sources, however they are reproduced in order to maintain the racial structure of a society. Negative stereotypes of people of color justify for the white majority that they [whites] belong on the top of the social order. Stereotypes about people of color permit their oppression and degradation. Wilson defines stereotypes in economic terms. “Thus the uniformly low economic class position of blacks reinforced and, in the eyes of most whites, substantiated the social definitions that asserted Negroes were culturally and biogenetically inferior to whites” (Wilson 1978, 20). In other words, stereotypes exist about blacks because of their economic position, and if blacks were not in this lower economic position, stereotypes about them would cease.

Contrary to this, Feagin makes the point that stereotypes rationalize racist behavior. Rather than the economic plight of blacks creating negative images, the negative images are “false or exaggerated generalizations” that become part of our understandings of other groups (Feagin 2000, 106). His work with Sikes also shows that even when middle-class blacks rise above poverty, they are still subject to negative imaging by whites (Feagin and Sikes 1994). Additionally, stereotypes help organize our behavior providing a framework of expectations in order for us to understand racial meanings (Omi and Winant 1994, 59).

### **Discrimination**

The way that discrimination is understood has also changed throughout history. Generally, discrimination is understood to be racism in action. That action, however, has been conceived differently in different periods of time and in different circumstances. In the past, discrimination was often seen only in relation to individual racist people. Allport provided a useful range of discrimination, [antilocution (speaking against), to avoidance, to exclusion, to physical attack, and finally, to extermination (Allport 1979.) Many other social scientists (Gordon 1964; Parsons 1953; Glazer 1971) saw racial discrimination as part of the assimilation process. “Other times the focus is on institutions and the ways that they exclude or include people because of their race (Hamilton and Carmichael 1967). Bonilla-Silva points out that this definition of discrimination needs to be tied to a system of racism. Instead the focus is on how individuals become discriminators, thus the solution is to fix individuals rather than to address inequalities in the social structure (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 60).

Research by Feagin and others has shown that discrimination is not just the work of individual racists. Instead he has found that discrimination can play out in many different aspects in the lives of people of color. “Today, black Americans experience discrimination not just as the actions of individual white bigots in one social arena, but rather as every day, recurring actions of white actors across many of life’s arenas—actions that are backed by a multifaceted and powerful system of white privilege. While all discrimination is carried out by individuals, the social context is very important, for that is where the beliefs, norms, and proclivities perpetuating racism are institutionalized. Individual acts of discrimination activate the underlying hierarchical relations of power in which whites generally dominate blacks” (Feagin 2000, 138). Though it takes individuals to act out discrimination, their behavior is not necessarily about their individual pathology, but instead represents systemic racist ideas.

Blauner points out that when discrimination is narrowly defined as the actions of bigots, other whites who benefit from systems of discrimination, are let off the hook. Racism is unfortunately too often equated with intense prejudice and hatred of the racially different—thus people of evil intent. This kind of racial extremism—while all too prevalent and very likely on the upswing among some segments of the American people today—is not necessary for the maintenance of a racist social structure. Virulent prejudice tends to be reduced, and crude stereotypes changed, by education and by exposure to more sophisticated environments. The people of goodwill and tolerance who identify racism with prejudice can therefore exempt themselves from responsibility and involvement in our system of racial injustice and inequality by taking comfort in

their own ‘favorable’ attitudes toward minority groups” (Blauner 2001, 19-20). In other words, if I do not blatantly hate people or beat them up or treat them badly because of their race, I can take comfort in the fact that I don’t consider myself as racist or as discriminating against others, regardless of the fact that, by virtue of being white, I benefit from an unfair system.

Discrimination has to do with actions that can be intentional or unintentional that result in a “differential and harmful impact on members of subordinate groups” (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 16). For Feagin, discrimination is a reflection of “age-old racist ideology” (Feagin 2000 138-139) and can change depending on the context.

Importantly, discrimination involves actions that are carried out by those with power in society in order to “reproduce and reinforce the unjust impoverishment and enrichment of the past” (Feagin 2000, 138). These actions can be subtle, “defined as unequal and harmful treatment of members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups that is obvious to the victim but not as overt as traditional, ‘door-slamming’ varieties of discrimination” (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 17), and covert, which is the “harmful treatment of members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups that is hidden and difficult to document” (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 18). There are also obvious or overt acts of discrimination.

Throughout U.S. history, discrimination has been a part of race relations. “Discrimination, far from manifesting itself only (or even principally) through individual actions or conscious policies, was a structural feature of U.S. society, the product of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities. It was this combination of relationships—prejudice, discrimination, and



institutional inequality—which defined the concept of racism at the end of the 1960s” (Omi and Winant 1994, 69). In the past, discrimination and the norms around it were often codified in laws and there were formal means of mistreatment. In today’s society however, norms around discrimination have become more informal and hidden (Feagin 2000,139).

As we will later see, the changing understandings of discrimination make its impact at times allusive and hard to prove. Omi and Winant point out that the neoconservative transformation of the term makes it difficult now for people of color to make discrimination claims, due to the fact that judiciary “restricted its attention to injury done to the individual as opposed to the group, and to advocacy of a color-blind racial policy” (Omi and Winant 1994, 70). Before the Civil Rights Legislation, covert discrimination was less necessary. Today, though, acts of discrimination have become more elusive.

### **Institutional Discrimination**

Discrimination that involves “organizationally prescribed or community prescribed action that by intention has a differential and negative impact on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups” is known as direct institutional discrimination (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 16). Indirect institutionalized discrimination has to do with the practices of the dominant group in a society that regulate norms that end up impacting subordinate groups negatively though they were not intended to (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 16-17). Whether intended or not, institutional discrimination serves a purpose, which is to create, perpetuate, and maintain the racial hierarchy. Institutional

discrimination often excludes people of color from access to institutions. For example, African Americans faced institutional discrimination when they were disallowed from voting during and after slavery, which was institutional discrimination in its direct form. An example of indirect discrimination could be a college admissions criteria that requires students to visit campus more than once. Though not intended to harm (hopefully!) this policy could exclude those who are not able due financial burdens due to past inequalities.

What is critical about institutional discrimination is its importance in maintaining white privilege. “The processes that maintain domination—control of whites over nonwhites—are built into major social institutions. These institutions either exclude or restrict the participation of racial groups by procedures that have become conventional, part of the bureaucratic system of rules and regulations. Thus there is little need for prejudice as a motivating force” (Blauner 2001, 20). In the color-blind transformation of society, institutional discrimination maintains boundaries without the need for overt racist practices. As it is no longer normative, nor legal, to blatantly discriminate against someone because of their race, society has adapted by utilizing institutional discrimination to exclude those deemed unworthy or undesirable.

### **Systemic Racism**

The theoretical perspective that informs this research is systemic racism. Systemic racism includes racism at several levels of analysis (individual, structural, societal, historical) and as such, contributes greatly to our current understanding of how race dynamics operate in today’s society. Systemic racism is a term advocated by

Feagin (2000) and variants can be found in the work of other race and ethnicity scholars. Related to institutional discrimination, systemic racism looks beyond individual racists to explain inequality. Instead, “It is both individual and systemic. Indeed, systemic racism is perpetuated by a broad social reproduction process that generates not only recurring patterns of discrimination within institutions and by individuals but also an alienating racist relationship—on the one hand, the racially oppressed, and on the other, the racial oppressors. The former seeks to overthrow the system, while the latter seeks to maintain it (Feagin 2000, 6). Racism occurs at the individual *and* institutional level and is founded in a racist social structure.

This conceptualization of racism comes into conflict with Wilson’s model of racism, which is primarily based on the economic system. For Wilson, “different systems of production and/or different arrangements of the polity have imposed different constraints on the way in which racial groups have interacted in the United States, constraints that have structured the relations between racial groups and that have produce dissimilar contexts not only for the manifestation of racial antagonisms but also for racial group access to rewards and privileges” (Wilson 1978, 3). While the systemic racism does not deny the economic structures that can reproduce racism and racist ideology, the economic system is not necessarily the only basis of unequal race relations.

Wilson’s contention is that during slavery, the post-bellum era, and the period from the late 1800s until the New Deal, race was an important organizing structure based on the economic position of blacks and whites. Because of black exclusion from the polity and from most other social institutions, race was a salient feature of African

American life that shaped their interaction with whites. In the post-Civil rights era, with the elimination of the structural, legal barriers, Wilson feels that class will become more important than race in shaping social relations between people.

Systemic racism is not primarily based in the economic structure, but instead acknowledges that the racist formation of our country has meant that racism permeates *all* aspects of society, including the state which Wilson optimistically believes is autonomous to racial concerns (Wilson 1978, 17). Though Wilson makes it clear that he is not discounting race as an important variable in the lives of people of color, his argument is that class is more salient in determining life chances (Wilson 1978, 23).

However, systemic racism does not limit its theoretical lens to economic concerns. “Systemic racism includes a diverse assortment of racist practices: the unjustly gained economic and political power of whites, the continuing resource inequalities; and the white-racist ideologies, attitudes, and institutions created to preserve white advantages and power. One can accurately describe the United States as a ‘total racist society’ in which every major aspect of life is shaped to some degree by the core racist realities” (Feagin 2000, 16). According to Feagin, racism is built into the foundation of the United States and its continuation exists in all unearned gains that whites have over people of color. It has to do with the maintenance of white privilege and systemic racism operates in the day-to-day interactions of people, as well as institutional discrimination (Feagin 2000). “Systemic racism is thus a system of oppression made up of many thousands of everyday acts of mistreatment of black

Americans by white Americans, incidents that range from the subtle and hard to observe to the blatant and easy to notice” (Feagin 2000, 139).

Other researchers have also identified the ways in which racism operates at the systemic level. Bonilla-Silva frames society in terms of a racialized social system. “In all racialized social systems the placement of actors in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations among the races. The race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation...” (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 37). Similar to Feagin, Bonilla-Silva emphasizes a racial hierarchy that penetrates all aspects of a society, where one group is privileged.

Omi and Winant’s idea of a racial project is also a systemic view of racism. They define a racial project as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning” (Omi and Winant 1994, 56). Here we see similarities to Feagin’s systemic racism in that the racial project has to do with both the societal ideological conceptualization of race, as well as how that plays out in every day experiences.

Finally, Blauner also has elements of systemic racism in his colonialization perspective. He states that in order to truly understand racial dynamics in the United

States, we have to understand the dynamics that were present during colonialism.

“Western colonialism brought into existence the present-day patterns of racial stratification; in the United States, as elsewhere, it was a colonial experience that generated a lineup of ethnic and racial division” (Blauner 2001, 22). Again we see a hierarchical division of people along racial lines.

This hierarchical division is key when analyzing the experiences of Latinos. Because of their placement in the hierarchy, what they experience is at times very similar and at times very different from what other groups encounter. As Feagin has pointed out, our racial hierarchy can be thought of as a black-white continuum, with African Americans on the bottom of the system and whites on the top. Other groups fall somewhere in between these two groups.

In earlier periods, whites usually placed new Asian or Latino groups near the black end of the racist continuum and targeted them for racial exploitation and oppression. Later in the process of group interaction, some groups within these broad umbrella categories—especially the better educated and lighter-skinned—have been moved by whites to an intermediate position or one closer to the white end of the racist white-to-black continuum. The purpose of this placement is often to destroy coalitions between peoples of color, and to thereby protect the system of white privilege (Feagin 2000, 232).

This is a key dimension to my research. The experiences of recent immigrants will be different than those who have been in the country longer. Those Latinos who are more assimilated, light-skinned, or in other ways more white, are less likely to encounter racism and discrimination. It is also important to note that those who are less-white, will be closer to the black-end of the continuum. They will likely encounter more racism and discrimination from whites. Though there will be similarities in how this group is

treated compared to African Americans, Feagin points out that African American's are still ranked lower than Latinos. This is due to the varied historical experience that these groups have had.

However, as this research will show, Latinos still do face racism and discrimination from whites. Parity with whites has not been achieved for a vast number of Latinos, however, those who are more similar to whites, in terms of skin-color, language, and culture, to seem to be faring better than their counterparts. "Often the lighter a group is, and the more Anglicized it seems to whites, the better it will be treated and viewed. Thus, if light-skinned Cuban Americans are defined by whites as 'near to white,' they will have a different experience than darker-skinned immigrants of color, including darker Latinos like most Mexican American, whom many whites will place toward the 'black end' of the socioracial continuum." (Feagin 2000, 211)

Blauner points out that in such a system, all members of the dominant group benefit in some way, whether working class or elite (Blauner 2001, 25). Some critics argue that all societies have inequalities, therefore racism is not such a big deal. It is just the way things work. Blauner argues instead that "when these inequities and injustices fall most heavily upon people who differ in color or national origin because race and ethnicity are primary principles upon which people are excluded or blocked in the pursuit of their goals, such a society is in addition racist" (Blauner 2001, 25-26). Bonilla-Silva critiques this perspective for excluding gender and class as important variables, and for the possibility that it may not be able to explain all contemporary racial problems (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

Racism has changed over time, as has the racial climate in the country. Though the dynamics of racism have become less overt, they have not been eliminated. “Several recent surveys have found that many whites think blacks are as well off as or are better off than whites in regard to education, health care, and jobs. For example, a Massachusetts survey found a majority of the white respondents saying that African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans now have *equality* in life chances with whites” (Feagin 2000, 124). Whites have an impression that people of color are doing as well or better than whites, when the reality is that they often lag behind whites in areas like income attainment, home ownership, and education. Whites are able to make the claim that racism is not a big problem anymore when they believe ideas like the one articulated above. Whites believe that legislation like affirmative action and the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s have equalized the playing field or even tipped the scales to favor people of color. They forget the decades of racial oppression that preceded this time, as well as the continuing significance of race in shaping a person’s life chances in a racist society; or are unaware of how racism has and continues to work to the detriment of people of color.

Belief in the intellectual inferiority of people of color as pervaded the national culture for nearly three centuries (Goldberg 1993). More important, the translation of such beliefs into law and institutional practice has impeded the pursuit of higher education by members of ethnic groups of color. The dominant racial ideologies running throughout the past three centuries testify eloquently to the flexibility with which European and American perceptions integrated color, the myth of intellectual inferiority, and the practice of racial subordination into an elaborate legal and social rationale to deny many students of color opportunities for higher education (Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991) (Anderson 2002, 4).



There is a long history of racial oppression and white domination in our history, as the above quote reveals. This history is ingrained in our institutions, our values, and to some extent our norms. Though some progress has been made, whites are overzealous when they claim that racism is all but gone in today's society. It still operates to exclude and deny people of color, while maintaining the unearned advantages that whites benefit from. This ideology is a powerful one. On one hand, whites are blind to their own privilege (McIntosh 1988) and on the other; whiteness is valued and rewarded in our society.

Since actors racialized as 'white'—or as members of the dominant race—receive material benefits from the racial order, they struggle (or passively receive the manifold wages of whiteness) to maintain their privileges...It should surprise no one that this group develops rationalizations to account for the status of the various races...By this [racial ideology] I mean *the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify* (dominant race) or *challenge* (subordinate race or races) *the racial status quo* (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 9).

These frameworks can be used by whites to categorize their perceptions of racism, as well as by people of color who have to contend with white racism constantly, in both individual and institutional ways. The dialectic of this ideology shows that it exists for both the majority and the minority. All members of society operate within this white racist framework in one way or another, either through the maintenance of or seeking of privilege or by opposing the inequality and injustice directly caused by the privilege of one group over another. My research investigates how the systemic racism perspective plays out for Latinos and if this perspective applies to Latinos experiences with racism and discrimination in today's society.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

For this study I utilized qualitative methodology which involved pre-interviews, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews with undergraduate students on three campuses. The campuses were located in the Midwest, Southwest, and the South. It was important to include various states (Illinois, Texas, and New Mexico) in the study in order to control for possible regional effects and to determine if racism and discrimination are something particular to one region, or if it is a systemic phenomenon of the nation as a unit. All three universities are state universities and are located in urban areas with populations over 400,000 people. Table 4.1 displays information on the proportion of white and Latino students at each university. Southwest University had the largest proportion of Latino students of the three schools included in the study. Southwest U had an enrollment of 27,000, 30% of which were Latino. Southern University enrolled 50,000 students and was 14% Latino, and Midwest University has 25,000 students and was 13.6% Latino as well. Southwest University is known as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

Table 4.1 Percentage and Total Number of Latino and White Students					
University	Total Latino	Percent Latino	Total White	Percent White	Total Population
Midwest U	2450	16.30%	6602	44%	14,999
Southwest U	6361	34.95%	8386	46.08%	18,199
Southern U	6349	17.10%	21,213	57.30%	37,037

I chose these three regions for a number of reasons. First, most high-school aged Latinos are educated in one of five states in the United States, which include California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois (Vernez and Mizell 2001, 5). For this reason, it is critical to understand what Latinos experience in an education system that matriculates a large number of Latinos. The Latinos made up 24.3 of the total population in Texas in 2000 and this population is projected to continue to grow, meaning that more Latino students will be enrolled in Texas universities (U.S. Census Bureau). I chose to do research at a large, research university in Texas, because it is likely that the Latino population at that school will continue to increase, meaning it is important to know what types of struggles these students face. There is also a growing population of Latinos in the Midwest. According to Census information, in Illinois, Latinos make up 14% of the population and they are the second largest racial group in the state, only slight smaller than African Americans (<http://factfinder.census.gov>.) For this reason, it provides an interesting contrast to the demography of Texas. The universities that I chose to sample in Illinois and Texas are both predominantly white institutions.

Additionally, I chose to include a Hispanic Serving Institution university in this research that is located in New Mexico. If Latino students face racism and discrimination that is similar to that experienced by students at predominantly white institutions, this may lend more support for the theory of systemic racism. Additionally, other research has shown that students of color perceive that there is less discrimination at schools with larger proportions of non-white students.

Latina/os attending four-year colleges with relatively higher Hispanic enrollments were less likely than Latinos attending institutions with low Hispanic enrollments to experience discrimination or perceive racial tension on campus (S. Hurtado 1994)...Campuses with relatively large Hispanic enrollments provide more opportunities for White and other non-Hispanic students to interact with Latina/os and engage in a variety of classroom and out-class activities. Such interactions diminish Latina/o stereotypes and promote greater cross-cultural awareness among the student body” (Hurtado 2002, 129).

Hurtado’s research seems to be informed by contact theory, which proposes that when groups have greater contact with each other, more understanding and tolerance results.

“Intergroup contact will be associated with harmony to the extent that it involves interaction that is intimate, where the surrounding social climate is supportive, and where the purpose of interaction is cooperative rather than competitive” (Taylor and Moghaddam 1994, 180). This theory assumes that discrimination and racism is the result of ignorance and that contact among groups will produce greater tolerance. This was not the situation for the students I spoke with. Instead, a few students talked about how more Latinos at their school meant more support for them when they did encounter racial hostility and discrimination by whites, which is a factor that Hurtado did not consider in her analysis.

In order to get at the everyday racism that Latino students face, I used qualitative

interview methodology. Quantitative measures of discrimination and racism provide only a surface level analysis of what people actually experience. By doing focus groups and intensive individual interviews, it was possible to probe deeper into the lived experiences of these students. “Although surveys, particularly those that rely on questions that fit new social developments (for instance modern and symbolic racism), are excellent instruments for uncovering the broad parameters of racial debates, only through qualitative studies or multimethod studies can analysts understand the way in which ideas about race are articulated and the discursive circumstances in which actors invoke those ideas” (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p. 60-61).

There were two phases to my research. The first phase involved putting together focus groups of two to seven students on each of the campuses in my study. During these sessions, I asked the group questions about experiences they have had on their campus, how racial discrimination is understood, how they feel the university could better serve their needs, and additional issues that Latino students at their university face. The first phase involved pre-interviewing Latino students in order to assess racial discrimination is understood by this group. The focus groups helped me better formulate my questions in an ethnically sensitive way, as well as determine the types of questions to ask. I ascertained from these students experiences that they have had that others might have also experienced, so that I could develop an index of discrimination and themes to include to use as part of the interview process. This step was critical in order to get at discrimination and racism and to delve deeper into these issues.

Focus groups are a good way to ascertain how different members of a group

understand the same phenomenon.

On balance, it appears that the advantages of the focused interview of groups more than offset its disadvantages when one seeks clues to diverse definitions of the situation by a numerous body of individuals...it will yield a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis both for designing systematic research on the situation in hand and for suggesting interpretations, grounded in experience, of experimental data on the effects of that situation (Merton, Fiske and Kendall 1956, 135).

By using focus groups first, I was able to get a better idea of how Latino students understand and talk about racism and discrimination. Though there are a few disadvantages to focus groups, as Merton et al. point out, they are also a highly effective way to get a variety of perspectives. Disadvantages include respondents dominating the group, not having equal participation from all members of the group, and not being able to get the same depth of response as is possible with one-on-one interviewing. However, hearing the experiences of others in the group may remind respondents of incidents that they have dealt with before. Additionally, focus groups are a way to collect a great deal of data in a relatively short amount of time. In my case, the focus groups were quite effective in gaining information.

Because racism and discrimination are not comfortable subjects to talk about, this initial methodology provided a clearer picture of how these phenomenon play out for Latino students. "The more people reporting, the greater the ascertained range of variation in pertinent opinions and responses. Particularly in a *focused* group interview, this means that the interviewer discovers a wide variety of definitions of the objectively identical situation" (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1956, 145). This methodology also helped to shape the questions I ask in the individual interviews which was the second

step of my research.

The second phase of my research involved conducting in-depth interviews with Latino students on each campus. I conducted thirty interviews, attempting to get an equal number on each campus. Because it was not possible to get a random sample as a part of this process due to time and cost constraints, I recruited students from as many entry points as possible. As part of my recruitment effort, I emailed administrators, faculty, departments and offices, and student organizations on all three campuses. Whenever possible, I pre-scheduled interviews so that when I arrived to the research-site, the focus could be on conducting the interviews and gathering data. I was also able to attend various courses to make brief announcements about my research and to recruit interested students. Additionally, I asked those that I interviewed to pass information about the study to people they knew who might want to participate. I tried very hard to ensure diversity in my sample and I feel that I was able to accomplish this. I talked with students of various ages, majors, socioeconomic statuses, and with varied involvement in the universities. All of the interviews were conducted in English, rather than Spanish, due to language deficiencies of the interviewer. In the analysis, many speech idiosyncrasies were edited in order to ensure clearer understanding for the reader.

This methodology was ideal in order to look for patterns in student responses about racism and discrimination and their experiences with these things. Bonilla-Silva used qualitative methodology in order to identify common frames “or topics, central to the maintenance (or challenge) of a racial order,” racetalk, “the idiosyncratic linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies used to articulate racial viewpoints,” and storylines,

“which are narratives that appear over and over in the justifications (or criticisms) used to maintain (or challenge) racial privilege” (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p. 66-70). Bonilla-Silva included long pauses, stammering, and other linguistic techniques in analyzing how people talk about race. The idea is that it is not just the actual words that the respondents use in their answers, but also how they say it can also reveal something about their racial attitudes. Though my research does not include an analysis of how students spoke, the qualitative methodology allowed me to gather a great deal of information on what students experience.

### **Sample**

As mentioned previously, interview data were gathered at three universities in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. I spoke with 30 students in interviews that lasted from 30 to 180 minutes. Because of problems with tape quality, I was only able to transcribe 28 interviews total, so the data presented is based on those student’s

Table 4.2 Percentage and Total Number of Latino and White Undergraduate Students by Gender, 2006				
<b>University</b>	<b>Latino Females</b>	<b>Latino Males</b>	<b>White Females</b>	<b>White Males</b>
Midwest U	1549 (57.8%)	1129 (42.1%)	4007 (51.5%)	3780 (48.5%)
Southwest U*	4688 (60%)	3193 (40.5%)	7178 (56.8%)	5462 (43.2%)
Southern U	3386 (53.5%)	2963 (46.7%)	11,163 (52.6%)	10,050 (47.4%)
*Includes students at all grade levels				

responses. Transcriptions were done by me, so I had an opportunity to review the interview material several times. Table 4.2 shows the proportion of Latino and White



males and females at all three universities. I included this information to compare with the sample I used in this study (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Sample Characteristics		
University	Latino Females	Latino Males
Midwest U	6 (67%)	3 (33%)
Southwest U	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)
Southern U	7 (58%)	5 (42%)
Total	16 (57%)	12 (43%)

The final sample included 16 women and 12 men. There were 7 students from Southwest University (unfortunately the two bad tapes were interviews from this university which is why this sample is smaller), 12 students from Southern University, and 9 students from Midwest University. What this shows is that my sample was not completely representative of the proportion of students at each university. It would be worthwhile to include a few more students in future research. Regardless, I made every attempt to have a diverse sample and avoid bias. The students had various majors and their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old. Most of the students were undergraduates, with only one student who was in medical school at her university when I spoke with her.

Though initially I tried to recruit only Mexican American students, I found that that label created some confusion. Because students identify in a variety of ways (See Figure 4.1), my use of that identification to recruit students resulted in students

wondering if they were eligible to participate in my study, because that is not how they identify themselves.

- Latina/Latino
- Hispanic
- Mexican American
- Mexican
- Spanish
- White-Hispanic
- American
- Chicano/Chicana
- By nationality: Puerto Rican, Salvadorian

**Figure 4.1**  
**How Students Self-Identified Their Race**

This issue was particularly salient in New Mexico, where there was a division between native New Mexicans, who identified as Spanish) and more recent New Mexicans from Mexico. Therefore, I told students that I was recruiting Latinos (which I realize could have still created some limitations.) The result was that I ended up talking to a variety of students, including Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorians, and so on.

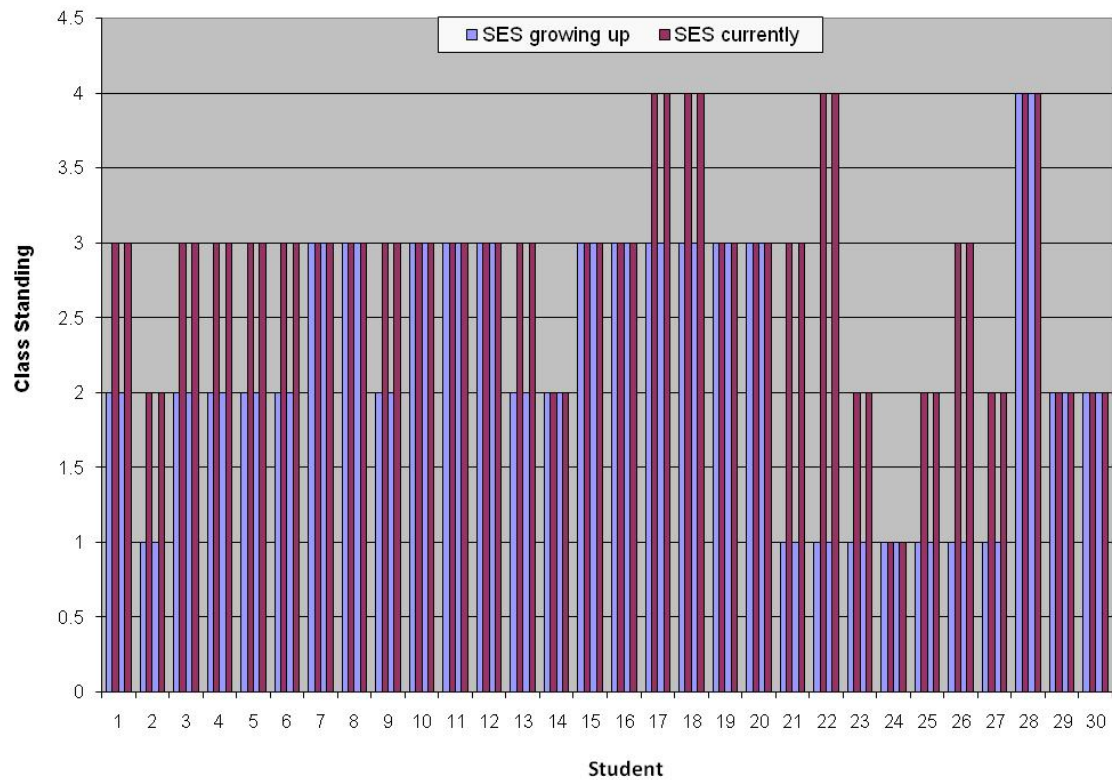


Figure 4.2 Student SES Growing up and Currently

As a way to begin the interviews, I asked the students to talk about some basic demographic information. Included in this was their parent's level of education, as well as their socioeconomic status when they were growing up, as well as currently. Figure 4.2 contains information about the student's socioeconomic status. This information was coded from their qualitative responses, so it is a somewhat crude estimate. The scale ranges from 1-4, with 1 representing poverty level, 2 representing working class, 3 representing middle class, and 4 representing upper-class. The bar on the left represents

the student's socioeconomic status when they were growing up, and the one on the right represents what it is today. We can see some social mobility for students in the poverty level and working class that had occurred. Only a few students identified themselves as upper-class with the majority of the students being in the working class or middle class.

Figures 4.3. and 4.4 provide information about the level of education completed by the students' parents. As we can see, for this sample, mothers completed more years of education than the fathers had. In terms of educational attainment, only about a quarter of the mothers and fathers had college degrees or more.

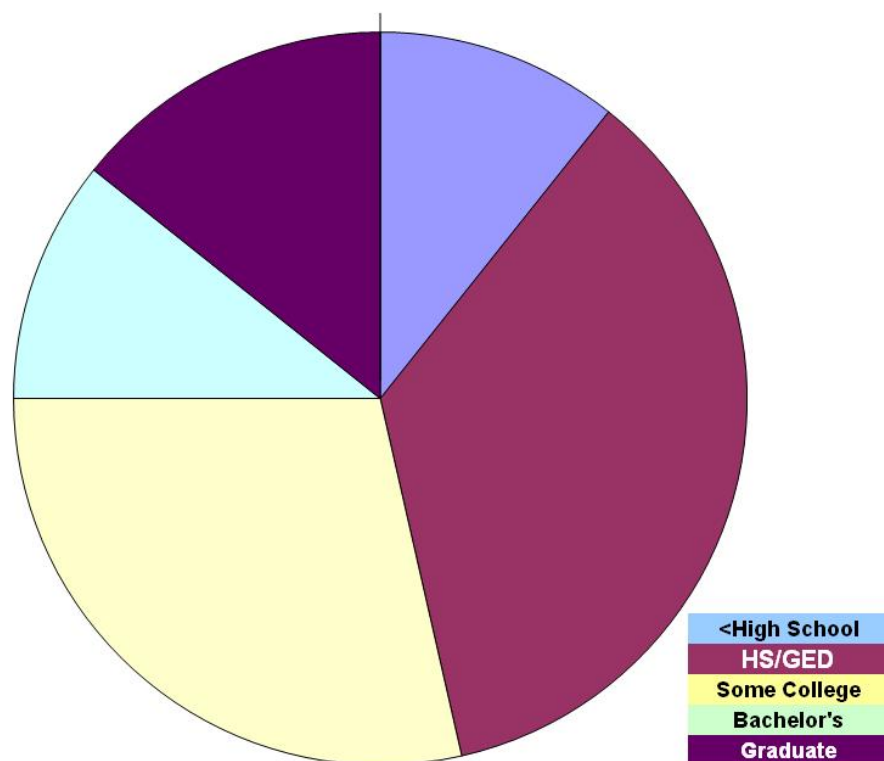


Figure 4.3 Mother's Education

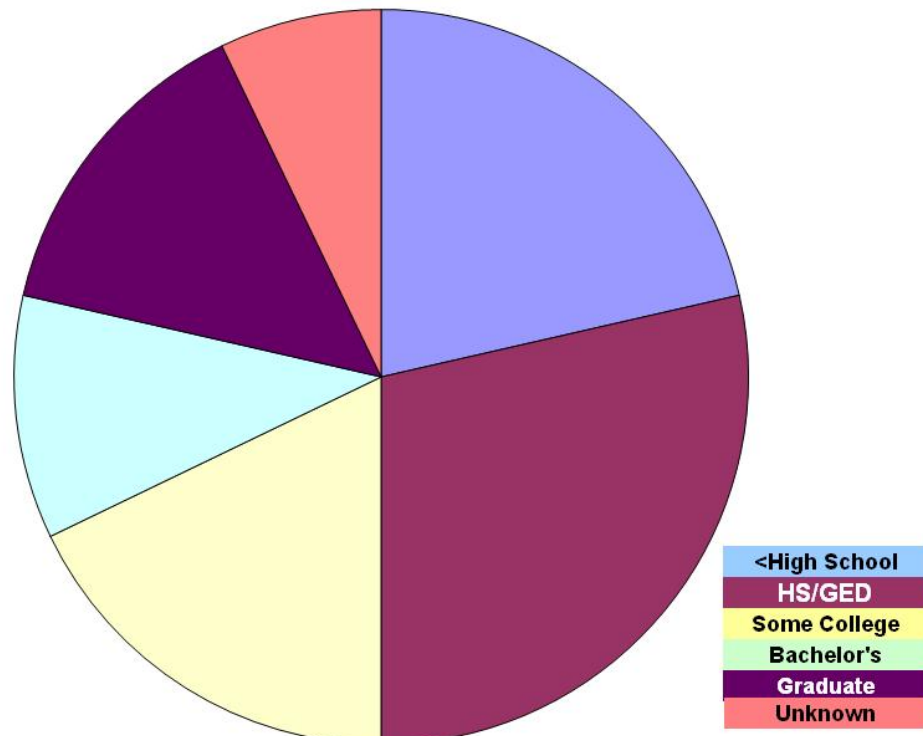


Figure 4.4 Father's Education

Therefore, many of the students I talked to were first generation college students. As we will see, for some of students that was a significant issue in terms of their knowledge about and adjustment to college.

The list of questions I used while interviewing students is located in Appendix A. The topics covered included what factors went in to deciding to attend their university, their experiences with racism on campus both on the individual and institutional level,

racism and discrimination off-campus, how they respond to racism when it happens, and I ended asking them a series of questions about how the university could improve. This analysis will focus only on the students' experiences with racism and discrimination on and off campus.

Because we were covering sensitive topics, the students always had the option to skip questions they were not comfortable with, so there are not responses from every student for every question. All the students signed an Informed Consent and were aware of the purpose of the research. In some ways, advertising the research for recruiting subjects was challenging, because I wanted to provide the students with enough information, while also not biasing the sample. Because of the variety of responses, I feel confident that the sample was not biased by the subject matter of the research. Additionally, I had to be aware that as a white researcher, students of color may not want to disclose information to me. I tried to make the atmosphere as comfortable for the students as I could and develop rapport through the interview process; however that still could have been a limitation.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION ON CAMPUS**

In this chapter, I will be discussing what students reported regarding their experiences with racism and discrimination on the individual level on campus. As we will see, there was a range of different types of mistreatment that these students faced. All of the students interviewed reported on at least one incident that they noticed occurring on their university's campus. As a way to transition into questions about the students' experiences with mistreatment based on race, I asked them first to define racism and then proceeded to ask them if they had ever been treated differently or mistreated because of their race on campus.

#### **Mistreatment on Campus**

Many of the students I spoke with indicated that they had not experienced discrimination when asked this broad question. However, when I asked them about more specific examples, many of them reported instances where they were treated differently. I will explore these issues throughout this chapter. To begin however, I want to explore some of the responses that students offered when asked if they had ever been mistreated because of their race on campus. Many of the things they discuss here will also come up later on for other students as well.

### *Acknowledgement of Race*

One student discussed how not acknowledging her race is a form of racism to her. Because she is light-skinned, often people are not sure what category to place her in. This became a source of frustration for her.

Um, I think that because of my race and the way I look, people don't know like how to relate to me. They don't know if I'm white and they don't know if I'm black, so they don't really, I mean sorry not black. I know I'm not black. I'm pretty sure anybody can tell. No, but um, they don't know if I'm white and they don't know if I'm Mexican so they don't know how to relate to me. And I feel that way like from my teachers and my peers, so, I just, I just think that, that's how racism kind of confronted me here at Midwest University. It was sorority week. And I went to get information from Gamma Phi Omega. And the first thing she says is "We're a Latina based sorority but you don't have to be Latina." And I said "Well, just so you know, I am, I'm Mexican." And the girl's really surprised, she was just like, "Oh, okay, well better" and so she started talking to me more comfortably. So yeah, I think because people don't off the bat know what I am, they don't know how to relate to me. And I think that's kind of racism. Like me, I'm open to talk to anybody. I talk to anybody, people on the bus, I don't care. I just, I'm really friendly and I talk to anybody. So I think that's really bad. Midwest University Female 21

At the same time, this student felt she was forced to represent her entire neighborhood in one of her classes. She lives in an area known for having a high concentration of Latino families. When her instructor learned of this fact about her, she felt that he sought her approval for any information that he presented in class about that neighborhood.

I have a sociology class right now that's um, I don't know the title of the class, but I know it's like something about Latinos and crime or something. . . So after he found out I'm from [names neighborhood], whenever he says something, he kind of like looks at me to make sure that it's right, you know? And it's kind of like, "Okay, I'm not this big [names neighborhood] expert." [You don't represent all of your neighborhood?] Yeah, exactly. He doesn't, he kind of says something and then he kind of, he's not really sure how to say, he kind of feels nervous because I'm there. And I'm like "Hey just teach! I know what you're



talking about, just teach.” That’s kind of how it plays out. Midwest University  
Female 21

Interestingly this student talks about her instructor acting differently because of her presence in the classroom. While on one hand, this instructor could be attempting to be sensitive by ensuring that he is appropriately representing this neighborhood, it has the latent effect of making this particular student uncomfortable. Her desire is that he would just teach the course rather than be overly concerned about what he is saying.

### *Expectations*

Another student from Midwest University talks about her experience at a nearby community college before she transferred. Overall, her experiences were positive at Midwest University compared to the time she spent at the community college. The mistreatment she faced at the community college came in the form of an instructor’s surprise by her success.

At [the community college], I think it was very different. The teachers weren’t really, they would always like; I think it was prejudice but they wouldn’t, it wouldn’t be a negative prejudice. Like “Wow, you’re Latino and you don’t fit the like. Wow!” Just the fact that they were so surprised. Because I was in an honors college...I was the only Mexican in the Honors Classes. So the professors there would be so surprised that there was, you know there was a Mexican in class. I would say that was a prejudice, like to be surprised. You know what I mean? So in a way its racism because they’re surprised...and the connotation was not negative, but it was like more like “Wow. You made it.”  
Midwest University Female 21

Though this student doesn’t label this experience as entirely negative, it is clear that the surprise itself is not altogether positive. There is a certain amount of praise that she has accomplished so much, but it also reveals an expectation of what Latinos are capable of achieving. The shock exposes that these instructors don’t expect to find

Latinos in Honors courses or higher education. Another student from Southern University divulges his feeling that his fellow students don't expect much of him because he is Latino. He gave a disclaimer to his experience that perhaps he was more sensitive to mistreatment because of an earlier experience that he had. So he wasn't sure if what he experienced was mistreatment or if he was just on alert for those types of issues.

There were a few times where it's been kind of hard for me to, in like a classroom setting, getting to work with people when we get together to do some projects. In the business school, there's a lot of people who work and get together...And then in some of those situations, I just felt like in the beginning, you know, you don't know these people that you're working with that well. And they just put you all together. I just felt that they kinda didn't expect much out of me. They were kinda, they kinda felt that I was being lazy, like I didn't want to get stuff done. Uh, just kinda had that impression and so it was kinda weird. But I took it as a challenge. Like I wasn't offended or anything. I took it as a challenge to prove them wrong. To do what I needed to do, so. Southern University Male 20

Though this student was able to overcome the low expectations that he faced by his peers, his story reveals what white's first impressions of Latinos can be. Because of preconceived notions and stereotypes, white students automatically thought that this student was going to be lazy or incapable of being a good group member. It was up to this student to prove he was worthy of working with them.

#### *Direct and Indirect Racism*

A student from Southern University talked about an experience she had with students from another university visiting her campus. These students were presumably in town for a football game and her interaction with them was negative enough for her to never want to go to the rival school.

If you would've asked if I ever, if I would ever go to Southern Tech. No, I would never go to Southern Tech, ever. Even in that city, ever, the answer is no. I just have heard and I got the taste of a kid, of boys came in for the Southern Tech- Southern University game and uh, we were listening to Shakira, some friends of mine. There was another Hispanic girl in the front seat with me and then a Bosnian girl in the backseat...But we were having so much fun and we needed to sell our tickets and so these guys had their windows open. And we asked "Hey, do you guys want a ticket. Do you guys want to buy some tickets?" And they said "Oh, we don't speak Spanish." And at first I was I like, "What did he mean by that? I wasn't, did I speak Spanish?" Because I don't normally speak Spanish. And then I was like "Oh, oh...that still happens? Like, people still are like that?" And so it was just kind of, I was taken aback. And my friend started crying actually. But I was just like, I didn't realize that still happened nowadays. I've never been exposed to that. Southern University Female 23

The student went on to say that nothing like that had never occurred with students from Southern University, but as is apparent from her comments, this experience was an eye-opening one for her and an upsetting one for her friend. Though there is a general belief that racism and discrimination is not overt, her story shows the brashness that still exists.

A few students talked about indirect discrimination that they felt. One student from Southern university talked about the visible tension that would occur when racism and discrimination were discussed in one particular class.

I took one class that was about Race, Media, and Politics. And, that was kinda like the one class that, even though you talked about race, racism, it was very hard to openly talk about it. Like it still, you know people'd get offended. Even I felt sometimes, like when they would talk about, let's say Mexicans, even though I'm not Mexican, but I relate most to them, that I kind of felt very tense when we would talk about that, stereotypes about that. And even when they would talk about, let's say Asian Americans, I would just notice how those students were sitting there, and kind of like not, you know trying to let things bother them and stuff. So, that and I guess the recent thing about immigration has been kinda hard, because I do hear some people talk about it and just kind of hearing their opinions about it, yeah it's very hard to deal with sometimes. [What kinds of things have you heard people say?] You know about a wall being built, about um, that we don't need those people here. And why can't people follow laws? Southern University Female 30

Here we see how students of color sometimes respond to heated discussions about racism in the classroom setting. From what she saw in this class, students of color would have to try to ignore comments about their race, though it was a tense situation for them as well. It was a palpable reaction for this student and one that she noticed in others. Students utilized a variety of resistance strategies when they encountered white racism. The responses included trying to ignore or avoid the incident; confronting whites about the comments or behavior; using the incidents as a motivator to disprove white stereotypes about Latinos; excusing the action as being motivated by some factor other than race; choosing to spend time only with other Latinos; denying racism as problematic; discussing the issue with other Latinos; seeing racism as normative or unchangeable; and taking on an activist role to attempt to make a change.

Another student from the same university also touches on a theme that will come up often in this study. He noticed a “look” that indicated that he was not welcome or accepted on this campus. Though nothing was directly said to him, at least that he revealed at this point in the interview, whites would, on more than one occasion, give him a look that suggested his presence was unwelcome.

I would say yeah, there's been a couple times. Maybe I get like a look or something. Because there's, I walk around and I don't see that many, and at first it was like a cultural shock to me. I was like “Whoa,” now I'm used to it.  
Southern University Male 18

This student also wisely talks about the lack of Latino faces on his campus and that this white environment was an adjustment for him. As specified before, Southern University is about 14 percent Latino, which helps explain what this student was noticing on campus. What is key about this student's comment is the impact of non-verbal or covert

racism. The “look” is something that will come up frequently throughout the rest of this analysis.

*Feeling Exposed and Going Unnoticed*

Two students from Midwest University articulated two opposing issues that they faced on campus. One of the students talked about feeling very exposed because of her family background and her choices to get involved in discussing issues that Latinos face on campus. She is related to a very famous activist for the Chicano community and felt because of that connection that she was on the administration’s radar.

I’ve grown up my whole life basically being a mini-activist. So I get on this campus and of course, that sort of came out, especially because we were having some problems. If you’re a minority here the state has given funding for us to get tutoring and some other things and that program has kind of been up in arms lately and so I’ve been kind of one of the people to be active in trying to make sure that that program still exists and continues. So a little bit of the “Well she’s a Latina that” you know “that’s in this family and she’s gotta be an activist.” I don’t know how much racism that is, but I feel like the administration all knows definitely who I am these days. And I have to be very careful. You know I have to, if I make one wrong move, I feel like I could definitely be in trouble. And that’s a little bit hard, whereas I wonder if that would be true if I wasn’t Latino. Or if, you know, I didn’t have the family background that I have. Midwest University Female 24 medical student

This student wonders if things would be different if she were white or if she wasn’t as outspoken. Regardless, in her current situation, she feels that she has to be cautious and that there would be serious consequences if she wasn’t. Her comment also points to institutional racism when she expresses her concern about the university eliminating a program meant to assist students of color. At the same time, another student talks about going unnoticed on campus.

I don’t think I’ve been mistreated, but I definitely don’t see how, if it weren’t for offices like the Latino Cultural Center here on campus, and even to some extent

[names office], which is like a recruiting tool just for Latino students, I think that I would basically go unnoticed. There's not much emphasis on me being a Latino student, seeing that there is a retention problem with Latino students. I don't see them really, like focusing, like when I was with, in the psychology major—I went unnoticed. I went to see the advisor, the advisor wasn't really trying to talk to me. She was saying that my GPA was not very good at all. And there wasn't any effort on her behalf to say, "You know as a Latina student, I see that there's not very good retention, and especially here in the psychology department. I figured out the people around me are white and bald, you know, and old. And it's a problem and I'd like to help you out. Let me take you to someone else that can talk to you and help you out." And I've see those disparities. . .Like they don't take the lived experience of student of color into consideration...We come from broken homes, from broken families. We have different lived experiences that sometimes force us to become independent early on. And um, so I see those disparities from bureaucratic levels. Midwest University Female 24

This student emphasizes the importance of offices, departments, and organizations that are dedicated to help Latino students. Her insights demonstrate the need for these offices, because without them, she would feel like no one really cares that Latinos attend the school. She also points out the difficulties that Latino students sometimes bring with them when they get to college. She is one of many students who talked about living on their own, raising children, supporting their families, coming from difficulties in their neighborhoods, and so on. Some Latinos come to college with issues that Anglo students do not have to face. That combined with being on a predominantly white campus can be discouraging for Latino students, especially if they feel that they are not being supported by the institution.

Notably, seventeen of the 28 students included in this research did not report feeling mistreated or treated differently on campus because of their race. Also of note is that all seven of the students from Southwest University gave this answer. This could be interpreted as over half of the students not experiencing racism or discrimination on their

campuses, but I believe this would be a hasty conclusion. Initially, students said they faced no discrimination, but later in the interview almost all related instances of racial hostility and discrimination. Previous work by Feagin and others has shown that this response from people of color is not uncommon. It can be a defensive mechanism for people not wanting to relive a painful experience; or it is also possible that racism and discrimination are such common experiences that they become normative and thus harder to recall or identify as significant incidents. This provides support for the idea that racism in the United States is systemic and something that is present in our day-to-day actions and our institutions, but can go unnoticed. In some ways, racism has become so normative that it is even more difficult to identify as a problem. This issue required changing my interview questionnaire and creating an index with specific incidents that other students had previously shared or were revealed in the literature.

It is also important to note that I do not deny that some students have had positive experiences on their campuses, because that also came through in a few responses. For example, this student talks about the availability of assistance when he has needed it.

No. I've been treated normal. It's just been great you know. Respect. Help has been there. You just kinda go find the help and they're not gonna say "Oh no, I'm too busy" or anything. They're just like "Hold on. I have to do, to do this or that." But it doesn't matter who comes in the door, they'll help you. Midwest University Male 18

A student from Southwest University talked about how friendly people on his campus are and how he has felt accepted for who he is from the moment he got there. A woman from Southern University discussed how her race likely helped her get accepted to her

university and that she has not faced overt discrimination, nor has noticed subtle mistreatment.

However, even when students are denying that they've encountered racism or mistreatment; their responses also indicate that they could be excusing negative experiences for something else.

Mmm, uh not really. I don't, I think that I've been treated, I would say equally. Um, like sometimes there's students that, like you get this vibe from them, but it's like "Oh, maybe they just don't like me." You know your style or whatever. Or maybe it's that, I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. Sometimes it's just, I'm like "Oh they might be stuck-up." But I don't know. But they could be like "Oh, she looks Hispanic." But, no I don't think so. I don't, I don't feel that I have been. Who knows though? [chuckles] Midwest University  
Female 23

This student has sometimes gotten a "vibe" from other students that she could interpret as discrimination because she's Latina. Instead though, she wonders if maybe the explanations lie in the person themselves. Maybe they are "stuck-up" which is why she's getting that feeling from them. Though it is difficult to know what the vibe she received was all about, it leaves open the possibility that she was being treated differently because of her race and not because that person was just unfriendly in general.

Methodologically, this was an important question and it helped me to shape my interview questionnaire. Had I stopped with this question and not probed more deeply, I could have easily concluded that Latino students do not really face all that much discrimination on their campuses. However, as will be shown, this was not the case.



## **Race over Merit**

Students of color often have to prove that they have earned their spot at the university, because there is an assumption by white students, faculty, and staff that they are only at the university because of their race. Affirmative action in higher education continues to be contested ground and controversial; and with it comes the expectation that Latino students are not truly worthy to be at the institution. In fact, a number of students that I interviewed talked about comments they heard prior to attending their university or soon after they got there.

When I was in high school and I was working at this one place. And a high school acquaintance worked at the same as I. And then we were talking like college and everything, because I guess we were juniors or seniors. And, the point is she was talking about like, and she was Caucasian, and the point is, she was talking about like that she wanted to go to [names university]. . . We were seniors and I think they had said like reject, like denied her, or said “no,” that she couldn’t get in. But before she had said that, I had said “Oh my brother goes there.” And then she was just like, and then she said “Oh well I got denied.” And she’s like “Oh your brother probably got in because he’s Hispanic.” But she said it like, like, like taking her anger out I guess at me. And I was like “Whoa, she got out of line.” But I was just like, I just ignored her and I think she knew that she acted, I guess you’d say inappropriately. Then later she apologized to me. I don’t know if it was the next day or a few hours later, but it was like right after. She was like “Oh I’m sorry.” I guess she realized that it was uncalled for and she apologized for it. Midwest University Female 23

Here we see an excellent example of whites believing that Latinos only get into college because of their race and not because they have earned a spot. In this case, the anger was misdirected towards the wrong person, but clearly this is something that bothered my respondent. There’s a certain degree of entitlement or expectation from the Anglo in this story that she is somehow more deserving of a spot at this university than a Latino, regardless of credentials.

Another issue that a few students talked about was the white misconception that schools have to have a certain number of students of color in order to fill affirmative action quotas. Here one student from Southern University talks about the reaction he got to his acceptance into Notre Dame. Though he did not decide to attend that university, he still recalls the doubts he got from others about why he earned a spot there.

I guess that girl was just thinking about, about the affirmative action, like you have to have a certain number of Hispanics and like I'd gotten that before, but it was actually, it wasn't regarding this school, it was regarding my acceptance to Notre Dame...I guess you can tell when a person thinks that you're only here because of they had to, the university had to fill up a number. Because I do get that look from, Anglos, whites, and uh. At first it was really uncomfortable, and it still is, but I'm not gonna let that stop me. I'm not gonna go home and think about it. I'm not gonna stay up and, stay up thinking about it—but. [What was said about your acceptance to Notre Dame?] All the people back home, well not the people back home, but like just some people that didn't like me, I would say. Umm—or that wanted to get into Notre Dame. They said that I only got in because they had to have a certain number of Hispanics, and a certain number of Asians, and a certain number of blacks. 'Cause Notre Dame is a white school also. And that's, that's just what was said and they just told me I got in because I was Hispanic. I was like "Ok, whatever." I, honestly, I'm the kinda person that if you're gonna cut me down then that doesn't bother me. . .I guess I would say I'm the type of person that shows you, shows you by actions. So that's, just a little, adds to my wanting of and accomplishing of my goals. Southern University  
Male 18

Not only did this student encounter direct comments from whites that questioned his qualifications, but he also noted a “look” that he received from whites. This exemplifies a pattern of racism found in this research. Sometimes whites were more overt in expressing their racist thoughts about Latinos. Frequently though, Latinos talked about receiving “the look” from whites. This was especially an issue when students spoke in Spanish, but as this student points out could occur at any time. Also key is how this student reacted to racism from whites. He did not let racist comments from whites stand

in his way and instead used them as motivation to succeed. As a strategy, this student used encounters like that to fuel his drive to succeed. We will see later that for some other students, this is not always the case. Instead, comments like these can create doubt in how Latinos perceive themselves and their own worthiness to be at the university. A student from Midwest University faced similar comments when he first arrived at the university.

A lot of people will say, when I started coming to Midwest University, there was this whole argument of how people were being allowed into, being accepted into colleges and universities. So, as a Latino, they always would make comments like “Oh you’re only here, because we need numbers. We’re trying to make [names program.]” And it’s like “No, I earned my spot just like everybody else, so.” [So kind of like you’re not here because of merit but because of your race?] Exactly, yeah. [So was that coming from other students?] Students and sometimes I feel like faculty say kinda little side comments as well. And it’s like “okay.” And sometimes it wouldn’t be addressed to me, but somebody else and I’d be like, I’d take some things to heart a little bit as well. Midwest University Male 21

Even when students are not the direct target of these comments, it can still have an impact on them, as the above student makes clear. Additionally, he heard negative comments like this from faculty and not just from his peers. Though he could not recall the specific statements since they occurred his freshman year, the impact of message still seemed to resonate with him. Another student talked about the value of affirmative action in acknowledging the differential educational experiences that students from public schools and college preparation schools receive. For this student, affirmative action is a way to level the playing field, which is grossly unequal.

I mean like in my case coming from a school where it was obvious the people that they were prepping for college and the people that they gave no information to. I mean is it really unfair to kinda weigh them on the same level when they’re not given the same choices. So I mean for me I think, you know, if on my

application they did consider you giving me an extra point because I am Hispanic and the school that I came from, then I think that's fair, because I didn't get the education that somebody else from a well-prepared school did get. So, and I mean it's not like they're, you still have to work, come in here and work hard. It's not they're saying "Oh, they're Hispanic, let them pass." You still gotta come here and work hard. Southern University Female 30

Importantly, this student points out that affirmative action is not a free pass to an easy education. Instead, it is a means of opening the door to higher education for students who might otherwise have a chance. Opening that door does not mean that students of color do not still have to work for their education, as this student makes very clear. However, comments like these can have the effect of making the students doubt themselves in terms of their deservingness of being at the University. This student from Midwest University talks about questioning his qualifications before he got to the university.

When I was applying, I did doubt myself. Because I heard that Midwest University was really hard to get into. Then other people were like "Don't worry about it, you're a minority, you know. You've got decent grades, so they'll probably so ...." I really don't know the answer to this, but, thankfully they accepted me, but then I wouldn't want to know how they accepted me, because that would really upset me in the way that, I would probably drop my academic level and probably just transfer, because I would really want to be looked at as not just another affirmative action kind of person. I always like to know I earned my things, not just "oh, you're okay, go." You know? [You heard that when you were applying?] I was, I was aware of that. Yeah. And I don't wanna know how. Midwest University Male 18

Here we can see the impact of these comments. Not only did they create doubt for this student, but they also raised questions that he did not want the answer to. Whether or not affirmative action played into his admissions decision could impact his decision to stay at the university. However, wisely this student does not choose to focus on that possibility and instead overcomes the doubt about himself and his accomplishments. A

pharmacy student at Southern University also expresses how comments about affirmative action created questions for herself.

The program, what they're trying to do is get more Hispanics back to [the southern part of the state] and more Hispanic pharmacists back to that area. So, yeah. [chuckles] [So you've heard whites talk about that? But you still have to qualify for the program, right?] Yeah, you do have to qualify. The only thing is that we don't take this unnecessary test that they do. So it's kind of, I'm like "Well, yeah." ...I've also heard of other people saying like "Oh, well you're from the program. It was easier for you to get in." So yeah. [Kind of questioning your qualifications?] Yeah. And it's made me question, so yeah. Southern University Female 23

Though this student had to meet the same requirements to get into her pharmacy program, because she was in one directed towards sending graduates back to a predominately Latino area of the state, her qualifications were called into question. Her admittance into this special program left whites with the impression that somehow the criterion for her were lower than for them. That reaction also caused this student to cast doubt on herself as well.

Students also talked about how programs created by the university to assist them can also have the unintended effect of confirming white beliefs that Latino students have not earned their spot at the university. Somehow the presence of assistance indicates that Latino students are lacking in intelligence or worthiness to be at the university.

Especially because we have that program, so they recruit minorities all the time, oh yeah. I mean, my MCAT scores weren't great and I know people are always thinking—a [chuckles] [Have you heard comments?] We've heard comments, definitely. There was an email out at the Midwest University main campus...that was going around that had some, a comment on it about that that I just recently heard of. So I didn't actually see that email, um—until a later date. I don't know if I've actually had anyone say it to me outright, but I definitely know that that feeling has come across. We've had a lot of student and dean's meetings regarding this program and people in those have definitely said "Well, you know, why are there so many Latinos here? How come they are not able to get into

other schools? There must be something that you're doing here extra, because otherwise they'd be at the other schools." And it's true, I mean we recruit them, but [still the assumption is that you couldn't be here because of your merit it has to do with being a Latino?] Exactly. Midwest University Female 24 medical student

This comment is especially interesting due to the fact that the University created a program to recruit Latino students into their medical program and then at the same time, questioned why they had so many Latino students in the program. What is amazing about this is that the rationale is not that their program is successful at recruiting talented students, but instead that they must be making special accommodations for Latino students or else they would be qualified to go elsewhere.

The state where Southern University is located has a policy that allows a certain percentage of top students from all the high schools in the state automatic admission to their large, public schools. While that program is meant to assist in a state where affirmative action was banned, it has the latent effect of casting doubt on whether Latino students earned their admission, or if they gained entry because they went to an underrepresented high school. One of the students I interviewed worked in the admissions office and often had to deal with questions regarding this issue.

Even more so now that I work in admissions. I don't know if this applies, but I mean a lot of the white parents will, they really piss me off, because they're just like, "What high school did you go to? Did you get in because of affirmative action or something?" And they really piss me off. [They will ask you that?] I mean I understand where they're coming from. They're concerned parents and they really want their kids to be, it's like their dream to get into Southern University. But they all assume that I got in by some system, you know, like top ten percent. "It, you know, that's a really sensitive subject, but thanks for asking." Yeah, I've been asked a lot like how I got in, you know "Did you go to a ghetto high school?" Just things like that. That's really bad—I mean, you've gotta be nice I guess. You can't yell at them you know. But it's hard sometimes, because they assume that. That I only got in just because you know Southern

University's trying to increase diversity, and that's the only reason. Southern University Male 20

For this student, not only must he field these questions by nature of his job, but he also cannot react to those comments the way he would like to. Additionally, he expresses a great deal of frustration by the assumption by whites that he only got to Southern University because he went to a "ghetto high school," without consideration that he earned his place just like their student did. Other students from this school made similar comments about this particular issue.

Often white student beliefs about affirmative action manifest themselves in ways that are not directly confrontational to students of color. A few of the students talked about how this issue would come up during course discussion.

I haven't experienced it personally, but it is a subject that's discussed in one of my classes. . . So the class I'm in is called Difficult Dialogs: Race and Policy. And in that class, that seems to be the perception of the white students who are in that class. That the people that are of color, well not, not everybody, because for whatever reason they are more accepting of people from India and people from Asia than they are black people and you know, brown people. But yes, that's what they think. That we've been allowed into the school because of policies like affirmative action. And they also think that they have been negatively impacted by affirmative action. And in addition to that, they also believe that there's no such thing as discrimination. They think that's something that happened in the 60s. So, their awareness of the social issues are limited to their own scope and because they're not the affected population they just refuse to acknowledge that it exists. So um, it is very interesting. It's very interesting. Southern University Female 26

This student touches on a number of issues related the race not merit issue, as well as the way discrimination and racism operate in today's society. First, she points out the white student perception that students of color are only at the university to fill some sort of diversity quota. She also notes that African American and Latino students seem to be

held to a different standard than other students of color. Additionally, whites tend to overlook the fact that discrimination and racism still exist and that their existence have an impact on the educational attainment that students bring with them to the university. Rather than acknowledge inequity in the system that requires policies like affirmative action, whites are more likely to turn a blind eye to discrepancies.

And you're automatically, once you get here, like you automatically realize that the education that you got at your high school is so far behind the education some of the students got. You, it doesn't take like a month into school to notice, like you know it right off the bat. And there's nothing that anybody can tell you or anybody can do that can dispel that notion. Like you know that some people have better opportunities. And it's just very hard, in a sense for myself, to know I'm just as good as these students. I really am. I really believe that. But, how long did it take for me to—it took me forever to truly, truly believe that.  
Southern University Male 22

This student's comment points out the impact of inequality in the education system for some Latinos. He felt underprepared from the start of his college career, which was an immediate realization for him. Though on one level this student knows that the lag has to do with structural problems in the institution of education, it was still difficult for him to avoid internalizing the idea that he was not good enough compared to whites.

It is interesting to note that students who encountered this racist mentality from whites mostly attended Southern University and Midwest University. Generally, the students from Southwest University did not report encountering this issue as frequently. Two students from Southwest University talked about their experiences in military programs, and how affirmative action aided them in their acceptance to programs in that environment.



Ten of the students did not report noticing this reaction from whites. They did not report encountering whites assuming that they were at the university because of their race and not because of their merit. A few of the students offered reasons to explain this, which included the growing presence of students of color, increasing racial sensitivity on the part of white students, disagreeing with affirmative action themselves, not encountering these comments due to white students not identifying them immediately as Latinos (i.e.-having light-skin or no accent) or just not having that experience outright. For example, one student from Midwest University indicated her belief that whites are more tolerant.

I think white students are becoming a lot more sensitive and have become a lot more cautious about what they say around Latino students, because for the most part, the students here on campus aren't afraid to speak their mind and aren't afraid to defend their positions, and their positions here on campus. If it were just for affirmative action we'd have a lot more Latino students here on campus, but we don't and that's because there are requirements we need to adhere by just as much as any other student that comes to this campus. Um, so, I haven't seen that necessarily. I haven't had any first hand experiences like that. I think if I did I would definitely remember them [chuckles.] Midwest University Female 24

This student is giving white students credit for being more empathetic to the concerns of students of color, as well as being more likely to say something if they did have a problem. She also points out that whites are more cautious about saying negative things, touching on the idea of color-blind racism and perhaps white's front stage behavior (Picca and Feagin 2007.) Two other students talked about their belief that race should not come into play as a factor when students are admitted to the university.

Actually it's kinda strange, in the close group of people that I hang out with. I'm Hispanic, one of them's white, one of them's African American, one of them's umm... Indian, and then one of them's Asian. So, we talk about affirmative action, but I don't think either of us are actually for it. I don't think race should

be a consideration no matter what. ‘Cause in a way, to me, it seems like a form of discrimination anyway. Because it’s discriminating against the people who aren’t minority, but are just doing as well. So I don’t know, like none of us are really for it, but I’ve never really heard anything towards that effect. Southern University Female 18

Another student from the same university had a similar sentiment that race should not factor in.

### **Negative Reaction to Spanish on Campus**

Often the issue of language is a controversial one in the United States. With pushes for “English only” legislation and anti-immigration sentiments abounding, it is sometimes difficult for some of the students I spoke with to use their native language comfortably both on and off campus. Controlling language is a way that whites could also control Mexican Americans and African Americans. “Enforced adaptation to the English language not only marked the movement of early English colonizers across the lands of conquest, but also marks today—in attacks on black English and on Spanish—similar attempts to maintain white cultural dominance over those long subordinated” (Feagin 2000, 49). Responses by whites ranged from direct comments to more subtle measures. I will start off discussing the more direct responses Latinos faced when speaking in Spanish.

*“This is America!”*

Five of the students talked about hearing from whites that Spanish is not appropriate because “This is America.” Languages other than English are considered unwelcome and even unpatriotic. This is especially the case for Spanish, which will be addressed later on. Somehow this language is especially threatening to white student’s

ideas about what should or should not occur in their America. These encounters happened both on campus and off-campus.

This student from Midwest University talks about how current events can have an impact on how whites receive Spanish. Because of the debates about immigration and the controversy surrounding it, white students are especially sensitive to hearing Spanish being spoken on campus.

Yes! Uh, most recent debates on immigration and all. Even when I mostly see the signs that I'm talking, I just keep speaking to Spanish to my friends, in Spanish, and people, like white people would walk by and go "You're in America. What are you speaking Spanish for?" And sometimes, you're like "What the hell?" Like, we talking to ourselves, not you, so I try and express like "Why? We're living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Deal with it." [And that's happened to you on campus?] Yes. Midwest University Male 21

This student was willing to confront students who questioned his use of Spanish on campus. He also did not let the comments or other signs from whites interfere with him using his native tongue. A student from Southwest University expressed a similar sentiment and also points to the prevalence of this type of thinking by whites. He points out that this is a comment that he hears everywhere.

Yeah, yes...myself and others that I know. [On-campus or where?] Yeah, I guess on campus. I mean, On-campus, off-campus—everywhere almost. . .You always hear "This is America, speak English" And that's the most one I can think about I guess. Southwest University Male 21

The other students who experienced this type of sentiment from whites talked about it occurring off-campus or in high school. For example, this student from Midwest University articulates a great deal of information about how whites react to Spanish speakers.

Oh yeah. That's happened to me, not on campus but in high school. I mean with the issue right now of immigration, it's getting worse. Like if you're talking Spanish or something, you feel the negative vibe. Everybody being silent around you. And, it's just in high school, it's like "we're in America." Even what upset me was some people with [inaudible] they're like, "We're in America alright. Speak uh, speak, speak English when we're around." I'm like, "Well, don't we have freedom of speech, because we're in America?" And that would get into a big issue and all that stuff. And then we would get into a more broader thing with like, "Okay, if America's made up of immigrants, then why would, should we stop speaking?" And it was a big issue in high school, but not yet has it occurred on campus. But, not yet on trains or anything like that. But, I have a fear it will and I don't know how I'm gonna react. It's like you never know who, you know, that's thinking about that, that's gonna affect you. So sometimes you have that fear, that because we're the minority, we have less to say, because you never know how they could kick us in the butt. So, it's—that's, we have that fear. You never know who you're gonna talk to, who they could talk to. . . You hear "we're not accepting you." It's kinda hard, so you keep quiet most of those times. And it does affect in way how you think, how you act, who you're friends with and stuff. It's a tough. Midwest University Male 18

This student touches on a number of issues. First, he talks about both the covert and overt responses he's received from whites when speaking Spanish. He talks about a "vibe" he gets from whites that creates an uncomfortable situation that can be silencing for Latinos. Other times, the confrontation is more direct and for this student, he did not let the comments go, but instead addressed them with questions of his own. However, he recognizes that he does this at some risk, because as he says, he is never sure who he is talking to and how they could respond in turn. Importantly, he talks about how this possibility of a response from whites can affect his own behavior and his thoughts.

*"Are They Talking about Me?"*

Another common response students encountered whites feeling like they were being talked about when they overheard someone speaking in Spanish. This is not something that was overtly told to Latinos, but was something they sensed from whites.

A student from Midwest University articulates the dynamic of social control that can be at play when whites are unable to understand what is being said because it is in a language other than Spanish.

I can see that, but I think it's more of an issue about control. You want to be able to control your atmosphere and you're used to, you know, having your atmosphere, because you have a white skin privilege and you have a white superiority that is manifested in you, innately almost. Um, so I have seen those kinds of things happen. But students have made it a point, uh, it's just, uncontrollable. There's no way that you can stop a student from speaking in their native tongue, especially if that's what they're more comfortable in. And I've seen it all across the board, other than Spanish, I've seen it in other ethnic, other ethnicities, and other backgrounds. [What's the reaction you've seen?] It's more like, um, trying to, you can see, they look confused, like they're trying to decode what they're saying, you know? Like, "Are they talking about me or not?" Especially if it's like a group of Latino students or a group of Pakistani students. Or you know, trying to just figure out, "What are they saying? Are they talking about me" kind of thing. Midwest University Female 24

Because white students cannot understand what is being said, they are unable to control what is happening in their environment. This lack of control manifests itself in the fear that they are being talked about, when most of the time the reality is that people choose to speak in their native tongue because it is the most comfortable option for them. A student from Southwest University shares a similar experience.

Actually I have encountered that plenty of times, because—I don't know, yes I do notice that. Or even people who don't speak Spanish. When, like for example, when I'm with my friend or something, like because usually we talk Spanish. And people, I don't know some people like look at us funny and stuff when we're, you know. They just, it's just like a, they're very negative about that. And I mean I understand why, because you know they're probably thinking, "Oh maybe they're saying something bad about us" or something. But yeah, I do notice that. And my parents tell me "You know what, you actually shouldn't do that." Although, to tell you the truth, I don't mind doing that. I actually like doing that. [laughs] You know, but I mean I'm not the kind of person that will talk like bad about somebody. Southwest University Male 20

Against his parent's advice, this student actually takes some pleasure in speaking in Spanish around whites. He is aware that doing this can make whites uncomfortable, but he continues to do it, maybe as a reaction to the expectation that he should speak English. He later talks about how the negative reaction he gets from whites, which is usually in the form of a negative look, makes him uncomfortable as well.

*The "Look"*

Many students talked about getting a look from whites that conveyed that they were doing something wrong when speaking Spanish. Seven of the students interviewed reported this response from whites. In the era of color-blind racism, covert responses are often more frequent than overt responses. In this case, the response is a negative look which creates an uncomfortable or unwelcome environment for Spanish speakers.

Students at all three universities encountered "the look."

Oh yeah. [chuckles] I mean from my personal experience, I do that on purpose. So, I think that I enjoy the rise that I get out of them, so it's something that I do. But oh yeah, definitely...*definitely*. You don't do that, or you speak with as little of an accent as you can when you speak, because it's not, either you get treated differently, you get the looks, "the look." Southern University Female 26

Again, this student does not refuse to speak in Spanish though she risks getting "the look." But, she does talk about how this negative reaction can impact how Latinos speak. There is an incentive to hide the language or speak without an accent in order to avoid mistreatment.

Just kind of like this negative look to it, it's like "Well, this person's speaking Spanish and I don't know what they're talking about so could they be talking about me." Since they don't know what they're talking about, they just get very defensive and maybe start attacking instead of wondering what they're talking about or even not caring at all. It's just really petty. Midwest University Male 20

Not only is this reaction from whites somewhat paranoid, but this student also calls it petty. He asks an important question regarding why whites would respond this way instead of reacting with less hostility. Two other students talk about how Spanish provokes a unique reaction from whites, one that does not happen when students speak in European languages.

And people will walk by and kind of give us looks like “What are you doing speaking Spanish?” So, yeah I see it a lot around campus too. [So you’ve only noticed the look?] I’ve never heard comments, but I’ve seen looks. It’s like, kind of one of those looks like “Why are you speaking Spanish? You know how to speak English?” But, I don’t know that I necessarily pay too much attention to it. Because I’m trying to listen to the person speaking Spanish to see if I can understand what they’re saying, you know. But I do see the looks, and its kinda—it’s just interesting to see how other people react. Because I’m pretty sure if they were speaking like Russian or German or French or something, then it’d be “Wow, that’s really cool!” But it’s Spanish so they’re just like “Eh.” That’s what I think. Southwest University Female 20

Spanish is especially threatening to whites and elicits a negative reaction which would be less likely if students were speaking a European other language other than Spanish, as suggest by the student above. Somehow other languages are more interesting, exciting, and acceptable than Spanish. Instead, as this student suggests, Spanish is seen as mundane and inappropriate. Another student from the same university also notices white’s disregard for Spanish compared to other languages.

Not just really Spanish, it’s really any language. Any non-European language, I’ve noticed that people kind of flinch. Italian’s one that nobody’s giving them like icy stares. I guess you see it, you see it a lot more often in enclosed spaces. Like you won’t really see it when people are walking down, walking through campus or whatever. You usually see it a lot on the bus, like people faces when people speak in Spanish or any other language really. I don’t know if it’s discomfort or it’s like annoyance, but you know you really do feel it. Like you can see it in people’s eyes. Maybe it is annoyance or whatever it is, but there is

that definite um, they are affected one way or another by not hearing you speak English. Southern University Male 22

Whites' reaction to hearing Spanish is transmitted through body language, as this student describes. It comes in the form of stares, flinching, and a general vibe of annoyance.

Dissatisfaction to hearing Spanish being spoken is something that is often palpable, and there is an implication from this student that this same reaction does not happen with languages that are associated with whites. He also points out that the reactions from whites varies depending on where he is. In tight quarters, like on the bus, whites dissatisfaction is evident. But this is not the case when he is walking through campus.

Nine students did not report any negative reactions for speaking Spanish and three more experienced negativity off-campus but not on campus, which will be addressed later. For students who did not receive any negative reactions, the reasons for this varied. A few of them talked about getting a look from whites when they speak Spanish, but they do not interpret that in a negative way. Instead, they see it as whites being curious or fascinated by hearing a language other than English

My boyfriend speaks Spanish to his family, so a lot of times he'll be here on campus and he'll be on the phone speaking Spanish. But I don't know, whenever I hear people speaking a different language, I'm just like wowed about it. So if people did look, I would just think they were kind of going through the same thing. Because I always think it's so neat to hear people speak different languages. And you hear it so often here that it never really phases me. But I don't think he's ever been discriminated against because he speaks Spanish.  
Female 19, Southern University

This student assumes that others share her interest in language and therefore are not looking at her boyfriend in disapproval, but instead with interest and curiosity. Another



student from Southern University expressed a similar sentiment. Though she has noticed that people will look at her, she does not interpret this in a negative way.

Two students talked about how whites are actually interested in learning a second language, so therefore are open to hearing Latinos speaking Spanish on campus.

No, they're really good here about. I think everyone realizes how important Spanish is and Chicago has a huge population of Spanish speakers. In fact, we have a program run by the Latino group here on campus, um, a medical Spanish course, and students have to pay \$25 to participate and we get a huge number of students, so actually they are really good about that. UIC Female 24 medical student

There is an increased interest in learning a second language for some white students, which has created a demand for a specialized Spanish course on this campus. A student from Southern University noticed the same phenomenon. "...Some of these white people are actually willing to speak Spanish. So they wanna have a second language or third language, and Hispanics, you know everybody in [this state] practically speaks Spanish or tries to attempt to speak Spanish, so" Male 22, Southern University.

Knowing a second language is seen by some students as being an important asset, so they are more willing to accept non-English speakers

Three students talked about the appropriateness of speaking Spanish around non-Spanish speakers. For these students, they saw it as impolite or rude to speak in their native tongue around those who cannot understand them.

Hispanics speaking in Spanish. I have, and I actually have joined in with that. . No, just um, I guess people coming from Mexico and living here. And I don't know if they would be called Mexicans or Hispanics, but uh, they continue to speak Spanish and don't learn English and I don't like that. You know, if I go to Mexico I need to learn Spanish. And I know Spanish and I need to speak it there. Um, so, I've heard it and I would agree with having to speak English while you're here. But if you're speaking to another friend in Spanish and it's just

within you guys, and you both know how to speak English, then that's fine.  
Southern University Female 23

There seems to be some expectation that Latinos should assimilate in this student's comment, which is not dissimilar to what whites believe. It is seen as inappropriate to live in the United States and to continue to speak Spanish, especially if people refuse to learn English. Another student from this university shares a similar sentiment that immigrants should learn English if they want to succeed in the United States, though she does criticize whites for traveling to other countries without learning the native language there. Latinos are expected to integrate and use English, rather than Spanish being incorporated into the United States culture. Another student shares this sentiment, but mostly along the lines of etiquette.

I've seen that, but personally, I don't think it's proper or courteous to speak in your own language when other people don't understand it. So even I will react negatively when I hear other people. Not because I think bad of their race, but because I think that's rude. Because the other people don't understand. It's kinda like, making them feel un-included. So, I've seen that before, I don't know if they think they have the same [inaudible] I do, or they just don't like the language. But I've seen it before. Southern University Female 18

This student has seen negative reactions from whites about Latinos speaking Spanish, but she does not disagree with that reaction. For her, speaking in your native tongue when others cannot understand you is rude and may make others feel like outsiders. What is interesting about this idea is that there does not seem to be any consideration for people who do not speak English. Does the same standard apply when the situation is reversed?

Speaking Spanish is seen as a threat to American culture and the response that often occurs is one of covert hostility. There is an expectation that Latinos should

assimilate, which involves both learning English and refraining from using Spanish. It is interesting to note that this is a situation that students encountered on university campuses, an environment that we might expect to be more tolerant and open to various languages. This issue will be further explored in Chapter VI when talking about students' experiences off-campus.

### **One-way Assimilation**

In situations where one group is dominant, often there is a pressure for others to assimilate. At the same time, there is no expectation that the dominant group will take on characteristics of the less dominant groups. "Those who are not white, whether recent immigrants or long-term residents, are under great pressure, in the language of much social science and policy analysis, 'to assimilate' to white-determined folkways" (Feagin 2006, 47). I asked students whether or not they felt pressure as individuals to conform to the predominant white culture of their universities. For Latino students, the white folkways they were expected to conform to included a variety of things. Students felt they had to dress, speak, and act in certain ways in order to fit in with or be accepted by whites. Others noticed how they were expected to pronounce Spanish words incorrectly or noticed that Latinos had Anglicized names. Some talked about how they did not feel that they fit into a "tradition-student" model. This pressure to conform was not often directly communicated by whites, but was made normative by non-direct means. A few Latinos even felt the pressure to conform to white ways from fellow Latinos.

*Embracing Diversity?*

In an era where there is a great deal of lip service given by whites and institutions to the ideas of diversity and multiculturalism, it is interesting that there is also an expectation that students of color should assimilate to the majority culture.

And you can tell that there's an ignorance about certain students when it comes time to talk about assimilation or when it comes time to talk about different ethnicities. I think that students in general, but more specifically white students try to embrace this idea of diversity and this idea of this school being a diverse school, a diverse institution. You know, multicultural this, multicultural that. But when it comes down to it, you really want people to speak English, and you really want people to be this way. You know, they should be educated, they should not have broken homes, you know. They should not dress this way. There's these paradigms that I think students operate off of, and I think that some Latino students have suffered from and have also internalized. You internalize your inferiority and I think that a lot of Latino students have internalized that and they'll be, there'd be discussions within a Latino body about uh assimilating and going into main stream culture and the need to speak English, um. Midwest University Female 24

Contradicting values are expressed by this student. Whites claim that they value diversity and appreciate being at a diverse institution, but they also insist that students of color conform. There is an expectation that students should fit an ideal model of what a college student is: English-speaking, well-dressed, from a "normal" family, and so on. The consequence of this can be that Latinos suffer because of the internalization of these expectations. Because they are not white and do not necessarily have these characteristics that are expected, they begin to believe that they are inferior.

A student from Midwest University talked about the pressure to assimilate at his high school. He talks about how there is less pressure to assimilate when the number of Latinos or students of color increase. He felt that he was more supported and able to be

himself when more Latinos entered his high school. At the same time, he talks about how whites are accepting of students of color, but only to a certain point.

Yeah, because they're [whites] being open-minded about different cultures and different languages. As long as "they [Latinos] don't talk about you," you're fine. You're accepting. But you don't know if they're talking about you, so that's the other thing, thing that you're threatened by, and say "Talk English or tell me what you're saying." [Whites assume you're talking about them?] They assume, and then that's when the problems arise. . . They adopted English and that's, that was their choice. And my choice is not to adopt every single point. And I will support my culture and I will support some of their ideas, but I'd be more of a half and half. That's just my, my thing. Midwest University Male 18

When white students feel threatened, then they are less willing to accept students of color and expect more assimilation from them. For this student, he sees English as a choice that whites make, and he choose to not fully adopt aspects of white culture.

Another example of how whites may only be giving lip service to diversity is demonstrated by this student from Midwest University.

I really haven't seen it. Maybe I could have seen in like during the lunch rooms or you know, while people are studying or something. That you can definitely see how there's different little groups of people, just white people or Hispanic people and they're just so segregated even though we're such a diverse university. And it's just funny to see how, I'm pretty sure they aren't doing it intentionally, but maybe they just feel comfortable. But other than that's pretty much as far as that might go. . . You have such a vast group of people. People talk to them here and there but when you actually, you know, come down and aside from all the school work and aside from work, you just tend to just stick with whoever you feel most comfortable and relate to more. Midwest University Male 20

The clustering of groups might speak to comfort level as this student suggests. It could also have to do with preferences for students to cluster with those who are most like them. Often in the cafeteria, groups are segregated along race lines. This student notes that though the university is diverse, interaction with whites does not often go

beyond what happens in the classroom. There is a degree of assimilation for both whites and Latinos when analyzing what happens in the cafeteria.

*Pressure to Assimilate*

Students discussed the pressure they felt to fit into Anglo culture at the university. This manifested in a variety of ways. Additionally, some students have been encountering this expectation well before they got to college.

What really bothers me is just the fact that, the feeling, the pressure to assimilate begins way before college. And I think it begins even when you're introducing yourself. You know like I have like friends, even like where I'm from like speaking Spanish is looked down upon. And it's definitely like, I mean, and this is like the amount of internalized racism that goes on back home is like ridiculous. [Who's looking down on it? Other students? Teachers?] Other students, yeah. No, not teachers. It's students. The pressure to be this um, Abercrombie and Fitch prep-pretty boy is incredible and, and like I said you see it back home. . .And I guess, where it begins probably there, like you see it in the way people introduce themselves, like somebody's name is Martinez, they go "Hi, my name is Jack Martinez." And you see it because it's such a pressure to not pronounce things the way they're supposed to be pronounced. . .I mean it begins even with, with your name. The pressure to assimilate begins with your name. Southern University Male 22

For this student, the pressure to assimilate was evident in his home town. He points out the internalized racism that is involved in how people identify themselves and how words are pronounced. Especially at Southwest and Southern University, Spanish words were often used as street and building names. However, when Latino students pronounced these words correctly, whites would sometimes did not know what they meant, or would look at them weird. The same is true with names as this student points out. Our names are a fundamental part of our identity. Some Latinos feel that they must Americanize their name in order to be accepted in wider society. Assimilation is also seen as a way to achieve success in this country, though success at the expense of a

person's cultural identity. The next student talks about this situation, as well as the assumptions that are made about Latinos who do not assimilate, one of which being that all Latinos are from Mexico.

Um, a lot of times you hear whites—well what I've found, I have found interesting, is that the whites and the blacks have taken the same side on that issue. They both believe that we should assimilate. But their beliefs are also coming from a very, um, they don't understand the history behind that and they don't understand that not every person of Latino descent is an immigrant. And so a lot of times they look at a person, a brown-skinned person, automatically assume, "Oh they're from Mexico. They're parents are from Mexico" when they could have been from further south or they could've been Chicano and have existed here long before any European invasion. . . But interestingly enough, it's not limited, that ignorant perspective is not limited to whites and blacks. There are also people of Latino descent who agree with them, and that's what I was talking about earlier with the division within the Latino groups. There are people who don't understand their history, call themselves Hispanic. They believe that we shouldn't speak Spanish. That it's an insult to this country. That we need to completely assimilate. And they themselves have assimilated. Their parents have assimilated. But interestingly enough, these people tend to come from middle-class or higher. And so they're not understanding that that maybe possibly their rise, their economic rise had something to do with an earlier assimilation and rejection of one's own culture. Or that their color had something to do with it. Because even within Mexican society for example, there's definitely a caste system based on color. So that those that lighter-skinned have more opportunity, had opportunities to rise, whether it be through education or monetarily. But see, that lack of knowledge of history is what it boils down to. And it's bred into this huge ignorant monster and so um I would say that there's even within the Latino population anti-immigrant sentiment there. Southern University Female 26

Not only is the expectation to assimilate coming from whites, but it can also come from African Americans and Latinos themselves. This supports the point that systemic racism gets ingrained in everyone in American society. Though the message is coming from people of color, this is evidence of how the white racial framework persists. Whites have this expectation of people of color and because of the prevalence of this mindset, it becomes normative and expected in other groups as well. This student

points out that students who are light-skinned or from higher socioeconomic standing are more likely to assimilate into white society and less likely to see this as an issue, which is a finding that was clear in my discussions with other students as well. There is some incentive to assimilate, because in a lot of cases it can lead to more opportunities. This student even addresses the racial dynamics that can exist in Latino societies. Being more white is often rewarded, whereas being darker can have negative consequences.

From another perspective, this student from Southern University talks about an expectation that she would not object to negative comments made about Latinos. Because she was in the numeric minority, she got the feeling that whites were counting on her being silent and going along with what they were saying. This was not the choice she made however.

Yeah, I actually, I've gotten that a lot. This summer I traveled abroad, but it was really weird. I traveled abroad for five weeks for a class. And I think my biggest culture shock was with the American students, because they all, I guess, I went you know on financial aid. So all of them came from well off family and somebody, um, I don't know if they just didn't care or just didn't realize I was there. Someone turned to me and was like "I think, um, people should learn, or everyone should learn to speak English. My maid has been with us for so many years and she doesn't know any English." And then they started like making like weird comments and stuff, imitating. And I got really mad and I guess maybe they didn't think I was gonna say something. But I was like "My mom's a maid and try coming here, raising your family, cleaning your house and then going to clean your own house, check your kids homework, and do all that and then on top of that try to learn English. It's another language. Sometimes you don't even, they don't even know their own language, you know, the written skills, because of the lack of opportunities". . . [So these whites didn't expect a response?] I think they probably didn't because maybe they felt like they were in the majority. Because I know that they would not ever, ever say that if they were surrounded by Hispanic students. So I think, I think they take advantage sometimes of, of that. They took it, or I don't know maybe they just didn't think I was gonna say anything but. Southern University Female 19



Rather than allowing white students to continue to say negative things about Latinos, she took a stand against them...a stand that was unexpected. Even the fact that the white students on the trip would address these comments to a Latina student indicates some level of expectation that Latinos will assimilate with their belief. This was especially so in this situation where the student of color was in the minority, basically surrounded by whites. There was a belief by the white students that they could get away with saying negative things about Latinos, because they expected the Latino student to play along. Also of note is the way that whites mocked the Spanish language in front of this student. When whites ridicule Spanish, it “reveals an underlying stereotyping of Latinos...and their culture” (Feagin 2000, 226). This is another way for whites to discriminate against Latinos and did not go unnoticed by this student.

#### *Consequences of Not Conforming*

So, what happens when students of color protest this pressure to assimilate? A student from Midwest University, whose interview was full of compelling information, shared some insights about the consequences of not conforming. She relates the treatment some friends from her neighborhood get because they choose to retain their style and not assimilate into the norm at the university.

I have a friend. . .we kind of come from the same backgrounds as far as community and school. So um, when I first started here at Midwest University I was happy to see him. . .Now whenever I see him, he’s kind of hanging out in a group with a bunch of Latinos and they’re dressed like people I see in my community. Just have like an urban style you know. And I kind of feel that they’re always kinda, like shunned, like “Oh my god, how dare they?” Because they’re not conforming. They’re staying the way they are from their communities. They’re coming the same way they leave their house. And I always thought “That’s really cool.” Because, I mean, I don’t think just because you’re going to college you should start acting different or you should be

somebody different. And I always feel like their group of friends, is like, maybe they're each other's strength, you know, reasons for being here. Like you know, "We're all from ghettos and we're all here and that's why we like hanging out with each other." But I think that, I think that people always look at them like, "Oh my god. How, ghetto—like look at them they look like a bunch of gang bangers"... They're obviously not gang bangers, you know like. Yeah, they're here. They're students... they've got books, they've got book bags. They're not shooting anybody, you know? Like nobody's selling drugs like in front of you, like why would you even? So I always feel like his group is kind of out-casted because of their own style. Midwest University Female 21

This group of students is shunned because of their choice to not assimilate into the dominant culture. They are not seen as typical students, but instead the impression of them is that they are associated with gangs and criminal activity. Though they have props that a student would typically use, like book bags and books, the focus is on their dress and how it is not typical of what other students, particularly white students are wearing. This choice to retain their style results in these students being outcasts. Also of note is the connotation of the word "ghetto." When white's use this term, they are expressing a negative stereotype of Latinos and their communities.

On the flip side, this next student faced consequences because she assimilated too much. Her identity as a Latina was called into question when she did conform to white culture. But she also discusses what causes that pressure to do so.

I know a lot of people now tell me, they go back to like, "You're not Hispanic. You don't know how to speak Spanish." And I'll say something and they're like "But that's not Spanish. You don't have an accent." I'm like "Yes, I do!" And then, I know Hispanic people, if we don't speak Spanish we will lose our accent and I started to lose mine, because in high school, you take Spanish classes, but you're with, you're learning with white people. So you pick up their accent and a lot of people will say "You don't act Hispanic." So I guess it might be the other way around. You do, you get so used to seeing white people and the way they act you're like "Oh, maybe I need to act like them to be cool or fit in or whatever." So I guess, yeah, that's probably why a lot of us lose our accents. [What do they mean by "you don't act Hispanic?" What does "acting Hispanic mean?"] [chuckles] Probably like, you know, like *vato*, like "Oh hey *ese*, what's

up?” You know, like that kind of stuff. We’re not all like that you know. We’re, Hispanic girls, we’re preppy. We like, you know Louis Vuitton coats and all that stuff. You see the Hispanic girls walking around with their little Coach bags or whatever and some like hard-core Hispanic people are like “Uh...she’s acting white.” But it’s like “No, she just likes that bag. And you don’t like it so get over it.” That doesn’t mean she’s any less anything because she likes something that. . .It’s like people weigh too heavily on the way that we act instead of what’s really on the inside. Southwest University Female 20

This student talks about expectations on two sides of the coin. On the one hand, there is a feeling that in order to “be cool,” she had to be more white. At the same time, she points out that being a Latina does not mean fitting into one mold of that that can mean. She does not identify with some aspects of Latino culture, but she still sees herself as a Latina. The pressure to assimilate comes from whites, as well as other Latinos.

A few students also discussed pressure to assimilate happening to them off-campus and not necessarily at their university. One student who attends Midwest University talked about pressure she felt the suburban community college she attended prior to her arrival at the University. “Like at my college, they would like, they expect, to um, for you to act a certain way. And they down upon you when you speak Spanish or you know what I mean? Or listen to certain types of music. They want you to kinda dress the same and I would totally think, yeah. Back where I lived and the college I used to go to, it was like that. They expected you to assimilate and be similar.” Another student shared her experiences at her job in the Southwest, which often included customers being offended if she spoke Spanish in her work environment.

Other students did not report encountering or noticing this phenomenon at their university. Some did not encounter this because they did not have much interaction with white students. These students spent most of their time with other Latinos and so did not feel they had to assimilate to white culture. A few felt supported in the university environment and believed that all cultures were welcomed and embraced. They have so far had a positive experience at the university and did not feel they had to change to fit in. Still others just never noticed this issue occurring.

### **Being Asked to Speak for All Latinos**

Feagin, Vera, and Imani found in their interviews with African Americans, that many students reported being asked to represent their entire race in classes. One of their respondents said that it was as if whites “put the whole black race on your shoulders” (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996, 91). This situation creates stress and unwanted attention for students. Many of the Latino students I spoke with had the same kind of experiences, especially if they were few in number in a classroom. Though there is great diversity within the category Latino, there was a presumption on the part of white students or faculty that a lone Latino student could articulate and represent the entire group. Only seven of the twenty-seven students that responded to this question did not report this happening during their education.

Mm hmm. Mmm hmm. Yes it does happen. You become a Latino token in the classroom. And I think that sometimes Latino students become intimidated by that. But I feel like, we could speak on our own behalf or we can speak about the general population, sometimes can be misleading. But then I think that there definitely is sometimes an expectation that one Latino student has to speak for all Latinos in the classroom, because they’re the only Latino in the classroom, so I’ve seen that happen. Midwest University Female 24

Here we see that when Latinos are few in number in a classroom, they can become a token for their entire race. She points out that this is a situation that can be intimidating for Latino students, but also that being put in that position can lead to misleading information. It is not always clear if the “token” student is sharing their own opinion or trying to truly summarize how Latinos feel about an issue as a group. Another student from Midwest University also articulates the dilemma this causes. “That’s a bad assumption on their [whites] part. And uh, I think that, that’s a bad spot to put someone. Because what if like there was a lot of Hispanics the other way, and they’re thinking you’re speaking for all of them?” The next respondent shares a different type of tokenism that she experienced.

Yes, I have experienced that. [Do you remember anything about that?] I can’t remember what subject it was in...but, I don’t speak Spanish. I am Spanish, but I just don’t speak it. When they’re talking about, um, it must have been sociology, when we were talking about a certain class status. And they were related to Hispanic. Like low-income are Hispanics or whatever. And um, asked something about what they had said in Spanish and then asking me to translate. And I’m like “I don’t know.” [So they were assuming that because you’re Hispanic, you would speak Spanish?] Mmm hmm, right. Southwest University  
Female 21

This student was singled out in her class because of her perceived ability to speak Spanish simply because of her race. There was an assumption that she would be able to do these translations, which was not the case. A student from Southern University also talks about the expectation that she would have certain knowledge by virtue of being Latino.

Whenever you go to a class and the topic comes up with like Hispanics or something, and you say something, everyone will turn to see you and, I guess, kinda looks at you. I took a class, it was Social Political Violence in Latin America, but there was a lot of um, there was a predominantly Anglo class. So

every time I spoke about El Salvador, everyone just kinda looked at me. And the teacher would ask me questions. And I was kinda like, I didn't really grow up there, but since, you know, you're Hispanic, you're expected to know certain things. And so, it was, I mean sometimes it's kind of weird, but I think if anything people just have like certain expectations of you, because of who you are or where you come from. Southern University Female 19

Though this Salvadoran student did not grow up in El Salvador, there was an expectation of her that she would be able to answer questions about that country. Additionally, when she did share her opinion or thoughts, she was put in the spotlight with everyone looking at her and the teacher asking her questions. There was an expectation that she would be an expert on her homeland, which is not an expectation of whites. As someone of German descent, I am never asked to speak for all Germans or to know everything about Germany. That is not the case for Latino students. Another student from Southern University shared a similar experience about speaking up about immigration in one of her classes. White students would assume that she was an expert on immigration, though she was not an immigrant, nor was her family.

One student talked about responding to a Latino student who took it upon herself to speak for all Latinos in a course he was taking.

I had that happen in one of my classes here recently. It was in um American Studies. And an individual, she was from California, again like I said, it's diluted culture, she uh, made presumptions about Hispanics saying that all Hispanics are against police officers, because police officers have something against Hispanics. That we should look at authority with, that Hispanics look at authority with disdain. They don't like it. And then I said "You're incorrect. You're speaking for yourself. Because in my neighborhood where I grew up, we obviously called the police on people, because they were vandalizing our property. And to us we found that as bad." And she said that they didn't do that or whatever. And she made it seem like she was speaking for all Hispanics. Southwest University Male 26

This exchange demonstrates the diversity of Latino opinions about specific issues and how misinformation or even stereotypes can be perpetuated when only one view point is expressed. Also highlighting this diversity is a comment from a student at Southern University. She talks about how she is always called out to represent Latinos, but then when she starts speaking, she senses some regret that whites asked her to be the representative for her race because her viewpoint is perceived as radical.

All the time. It happens to me all the time. And the thing is that my perspective differs from the perspective of the typical quote/unquote Latino. Sure there'll probably be Latinos there that have come from poor backgrounds, or Spanish backgrounds, but to find a Chicano is extremely rare, and especially on this campus. So my perspective tends to be interpreted as the more radical, the more leftist thought, within the Latino, quote/unquote Latino mentality. So um, a lot of times when I'm asked about race or when I'm asked about my "people", people first of all don't know that I'm only half. And second of all, they don't know what a Chicano is. And so when I start speaking and I'm throwing out these terms and I'm throwing out history and I'm throwing out facts. They don't know how to handle that. And so I don't know if they interpret me in the end as a person who's representing or speaking for the rest of my group. Southern University Female 26

This student highlights many assumptions that are made when one Latino is asked to represent the entire race. First of all, she notes that her perspective is somewhat rare at this university. Secondly, she points out that students assume that she is 100 percent Latina when actually she is only half, and finally, there is the assumption that she can adequately talk about the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of her entire people. In the end, after she talks about her point of view, this student is not sure if others still see her as a representative or just a radical.

A few other students talk about experiences that occurred elsewhere and not at their university. A student from Midwest University talks about an experience at a

suburban community college. While discussing racism in her course, she and the other student of color in the class were forced into the spotlight. “And it was just, in the whole class, I was the only Mexican and there was an African American guy. And we were expected to kind of represent everybody. They were asking us questions like ‘So what do you guys think about this? Why is it that you guys do this?’ And it’s like, they expected us to defend our entire group. So that has happened to me a couple of times.” A student from Southwest University experienced this phenomenon at his high school. He saw it mostly as whites asking about his perspective because they were curious and did not experience this as a negative issue. Only a few students did not report having this experience and most of them did not elaborate on why. One student did express her discomfort in talking in class in general, which was revealing in terms of how that student perceived her place in the system. Her interpretation was that she should not speak.

### **Post-realization Unfriendliness**

While I was talking to a Latina student during my office hours, she asked me about my dissertation research. I told her what my study entailed and she shared an experience that she had encountered. She told me that many people did not realize that she was Latina, because she was light-skinned and did not have typically defined Latino characteristics. Once they were cued into the fact that she was Latina, they would treat her differently. They might stop talking to her or just change their mannerisms in a way that indicated to her that they had changed their impression of her. This conversation inspired the question about whether Latinos felt that whites acted differently upon the



realization that they were interacting with a Latino. Previous research by Murgia and Telles also found this pattern. “Light-skinned Mexican Americans, like their counterparts among other somatically varied groups, including African Americans, suffer the stigma of belonging to the larger group but sometimes suffer less discrimination and find it easier to negotiate their low status than do darker members of their ethnic group” (Murgia and Telles 1996, 287). Students who encountered this reaction were often mistaken as white.

Of the 24 students that responded to this question, nine of them did not report experiencing this. Usually the reason that they did had to do with being more identifiable as a Latino phenotypically. Four students had noticed this happening, but reported a positive reaction from whites after the revelation about their race. I will start out discussing these students’ experiences.

One student from Midwest University talked about whites being more comfortable around her once they realize that she’s a Latina. Specifically she shared a story of a white male in one of her classes who suddenly was more open and shared more with her once he found out she is a Latina. He was more willing to admit that he was struggling in the course. Her impression of that was perhaps he figured she had it worse than him, so he could relate to her by sharing that information. A few other students shared more positive experiences they had when whites had this realization.

No. Um, I would probably be a good person for that, because some people think, they don’t know what to think of what I am. I look Asian to some people. I look white to other people. I look Hispanic to other people. And when I say uh “I’m Hispanic. You know my last name.” [chuckles] They’re like “No way, cool!” I’ve actually seen an opposite like “Cool! Like cool” [So, not a negative

reaction?] It's not a negative reaction. [They act the same before and after?] Yeah, yeah. Mmm hmm. Southern University Female 23

For this student, the reaction when her race is revealed to whites is not negative. They do not change their attitude towards her, and if anything they are shocked and intrigued by the discovery. Another student from Southern University reports a similar response. Whites are mostly curious and shocked by the new information they have about the student, but it is not perceived to be negative.

People are always surprised when I say what I am. Because they don't believe me, I mean, do you know what facebook is? [Yeah.] Yeah, I'm in group on there that's says "I'm Hispanic and nobody believes me." So that might have something to do with it, but um, I guess it's kinda like a reversal, because people don't expect it out of me. . .[Do white students act differently when they realize you're Hispanic?] Yeah. [Is there a difference between before and after?] Um—not really they just start asking me lots of questions, they're just fascinated all of a sudden, because I don't know. . .and then but they don't treat me differently. If anything they're a little more like, intrigued. Because they just want to know more. Southern University Female 18

Though these students had mostly positive experiences with whites mostly expressing increased curiosity about their background, other students had more negative responses once this information was revealed.

### *Not Being Accepted*

Some of the students I spoke with had experiences similar to that of the aforementioned student that I was advising. There was a degree of shock from whites upon the realization that they were interacting with a Latino, but it did not always lead to friendly questions. Instead, some Latino students faced rude treatment after whites knew about their ethnicity. Though often the differential treatment occurred in covert, subtle ways, it was still something that was noticed by the students of color. It is obvious that

these events are painful and memorable. A student from Midwest University shares his experiences once whites realize that he's not Italian, but instead Latino.

You see the tone of their voice, how they look at you, what you're gonna say. After they know that I'm Mexican and stuff, some are like "Oh that's so cool," you know what I mean. . . They're like 'Wow, you look Italian' and I'm like 'I'm 100 percent [Mexican]'. . . So they're like 'Wow', a little bit shocked. They would not talk to me after that. And you feel it, but it's their problem if they're not accepting. So you kinda go over that and just, get over it I guess sometimes. You seem to learn from that. Appreciate who is really your friend and who wasn't and who is going to stick by you no matter. "Well, I didn't know you had that secret." "Well because you never asked, I never told you". . . And it's, you learn how to cope with it and that's when you kinda pull into your, like Latino side. It's like, you know, at least they're supporting you, so you kinda pull to one side, because other people are just not gonna. It's "Oh my god." [So some people think it's cool and some people don't?] Yeah, "that's cool." Yeah like, "mm wow," like "why did you lie to me? Why didn't you tell me?" Well the topic never came up, you know? We had so many different ideas [You don't usually introduce yourself with that information] Yeah, "Oh hi I'm Latino." If it just comes up, you say it. If it doesn't, you're okay with it. Midwest University Male 18

There is a lot revealed in this comment. First, this student experienced both friendly and unfriendly reactions from whites when they discovered that he was Latino. He said later that it's about 50-50 in terms of how whites respond. The negative responses he's received from whites are often subtle. He notices that their tone of voice changes or they look at him differently. There are also more overt responses. For example, some whites have stopped talking to him altogether. Or, whites will practically accuse him of hiding information from them; of lying about his background. It's as if whites feel betrayed that they did not know this information from the beginning, because they could not tell just by looking at him what his ethnicity was. There was an assumption that he was white, and when information to the contrary was revealed, whites felt lied to.

His reaction to this treatment is also interesting. He talks about how encounters like this make him want to pull away from whites and to spend more time with Latinos, where he knows he will be accepted. Another student from this university talked about whites treating him differently by offering him more assistance once they found out that he was Latino. “Like ‘Oh, let me help you with that,’ thinking like I’m slow. I’m like ‘No. Why are you treating me differently?’” Suddenly this new information makes whites call his intelligence into question, when it was not an issue before they knew that he was Latino.

A student from Southwest University talks about how she notices a change, but only very briefly. “They’re just thrown off by it because they’re like ‘What?’ And even in my ROTC where we go by last names they’re like ‘What? You’re last name’s [says last name]?’ ...And they just get thrown off by it. They kind of do, I guess, they kinda look at me a little bit differently, but then they already know me, so it’s not really a big deal, but I guess for that split second, yeah, they kinda just give me that look like ‘Wait a minute. Let me rethink this. Okay, you’re cool.’ And then it’s the same.” Though this group of whites has known her for two years, they are still shocked when they realize that she is a Latina. Though in the end, she is not treated differently by her ROTC peers, she does notice a brief moment when they give her a strange look. One student from Southern University relates experiences that a few of his friends have had. Again, the subtle nature of the mistreatment is apparent. He points out that whites rarely say anything directly once they learn that his friends are Latinas, but “You just can kind

of tell, just that the interaction's different. The way they, the way they handle themselves is a lot different so."

One student talked about how whites would say things around them, for instance negative comments about Latinos, because of the assumption that there were no Latinos in the group. Another explained her shock to find out that people thought she was white when she got to her university, because in her hometown, it was always apparent that she was Latina. Additionally, many of these students explained that they do not face the same type of discrimination as dark-skinned Latinos. Instead, they deal with questions about whether or not they really are Latinos, as well as assumptions that they are white and mistreatment when that notion is dispelled.

A few students talked about this happening off-campus. One student's account was particularly telling in terms of how the treatment changed.

I just got married like a couple of years ago. So now I have a very Hispanic name. Before my last name was [says name]. . .Um, but, so you kinda like couldn't tell what I was before unless you saw me. To where now you assume that I'm Hispanic. And it is a little bit, you can tell, you know like the service that you get like on the phone or something. They're not as friendly like they used to be before. And sometimes, I have some credit cards that still have my maiden name, you know, and it's like, "Wow, this is how I used to get treated." [So before when they couldn't figure it out, they were nice and now, they're rude?] Yeah, before my husband used to work like telemarketing, or uh, customer service, so he showed me, "Okay if a customer wants this extra service, these are the things you have to say." You know like "Is there anything else that you can do?" You know, there's certain things that you have to say it's kinda like a key to the customer service person to help you out. And if I did that with my maiden name it would work all the time. And if I do it with my married name, it's kinda like "Sorry" you know. "Sorry Mrs. [says married name,] we've done everything we can for you, um. Is there anything else I can do for you?" It's kinda like I just hit a wall. You know to where before it worked. So it's just kinda, I noticed that like after I changed my named. I was like "Wow, this is crazy." Southern University Female 30

This is a perfect example of different treatment upon realization that a person is Latino. Before she was married, people on the telephone could not tell what race she was, so she was able to get good service and felt that people were more willing to assist her. Now that she's married and has a more Latino sounding last name, the service and assistance has decreased and she feels she hits a wall.

### **Negativity about Immigration Issues**

Given the recent debates about immigration policies, it made sense to ask Latino students if they had heard whites on their campus making negative comments about immigrants and immigration. Many of the students had heard comments about immigration, and only four out of twenty-three students who responded to this question did not report hearing anything negative about this issue. A few students heard negative comments, but these incidents occurred off-campus and not while they were at their university

#### *Assuming All Immigrants are Latino*

The United States is known historically as being “the land of immigrants.” However today, immigration is almost exclusively associated with one group—Latinos. Though Latinos are not the only people currently immigrating to the United States, there is an assumption that issues related to immigration only concern this group. A student from Midwest University articulates well white students assumptions about immigration.

On-campus, like last May we had a May 1<sup>st</sup> march and also a lot of people out here marching. When I went back to class, I went to the march, and then I go back to class. One student was like “Yeah, I was stuck in traffic forever.” And it was like, “Do you, do you even know why they’re marching for?” And then there was even a black student who said “Yeah, I was stuck in traffic too.” And I go “You guys had the Million Man March and then nobody complains about

that.” But as soon as a Latino or somebody else of a different race starts doing it, there’s always staunch comments and controversy. [Why is it different?] They believe that all Latinos are immigrants and it’s just that they’re, a lot of people don’t see or are not educated about what they’re marching for. And they’re not just marching because they’re Latino, they’re marching because immigration is what the U.S. was built upon. And if we start closing our borders and all around, that means our great grandparents, even if you were white or black, they wouldn’t have been able to come here. But when you hear the word immigration, you automatically assume its Latino. But it’s not. We all come in different colors and sizes, so. Midwest University Male 21

Not only is there an assumption that all immigrants are Latinos, but there is also a belief that all Latinos are immigrants, as this student points out. He points out that immigration is the foundation of this country, which is what inspired the marches in the first place. Rather than narrowly defining immigration by one group, he suggests it is important to remember that many of his fellow students would not be here if it were not for immigration in the first place.

A student from Southern University talks about an incident that happened at a football game which also highlights whites’ negative thoughts about Latinos and immigrants.

I was at a football game last week. . .And somebody said, one of the fraternity guys that were yelling um, um “Immigration bus is here. It’s waiting for you. Get on it.” Even though [At the other players?] Yes, at [the other] players. “Juarez is not here. This isn’t Juarez.” They were calling them all sorts of bad things. . .And they were just being, real, real bad about it. Even though the make-up of [this] football team is hardly any Hispanics. . .And so it was kind of surprising to me that, why would you say such things? Southwest University Male 26

Because their opponent’s school is located close to the Mexican border, white students at Southwest University joked that the football team was composed of immigrants, to the surprise of the student who witnessed this happening. It seems his shock has to do with

the nature of the comments themselves and that whites would think this is an appropriate thing to yell at a football game. Additionally, most of the team members on the opposing team were white. Still, this incident reveals white beliefs that Latinos are immigrants and should not be here. A student from Midwest University articulates how whites view immigrants, which is generally negatively. “I do believe that they do have this just negative thing like ‘Well if you’re an immigrant then you automatically did something wrong. You are here illegally. You crossed the border. You crossed the river. Who cares about whatever you think, it’s so easy.’ I do think that they just don’t understand the difficulties that it does, to anyone under any culture to get here, um.” There are a number of assumptions at play when whites think about immigrants. Their framework of what immigrant means involves a Latino person, who is in the United States illegally, and does not deserve to be here.

*“They’re Taking Our...”*

Often when whites think about immigrants coming to the United States, their concern is the things they are losing as whites, rather than how immigrants contribute to our country. This theme came up a number of times for the students I spoke with. Concerns they overheard whites talking about had to do with immigrants taking their spots in school or taking their jobs, as well as what should be done to resolve this issue.

A medical student from Midwest University talks about how this issue comes up in her program of study. There is concern that if there are more immigrants in her program, that whites will lose out on future opportunities after graduation.

It’s huge right now, people are really talking about it, and um—and in medical school it’s also a big issue because we have a lot of foreign residents come over



so it's like "Are they taking too many of our spots? Does that mean we're not getting good residencies?" So it comes up a lot. Midwest University Female 24 medical student

This student also talked about how she's heard whites say that "if they weren't born here, they shouldn't be here," regarding students in her program who are also immigrants. There is a general concern that Latinos are undeservingly in school and that whites, who *are* deserving, lose out. Whites also have this concern when it comes to the job market, as the next student points out.

The whole, like typical, they're taking jobs. I mean, it's kinda—it's probably better for our economy. I don't know. It's kind of a weird issue because I mean, it's hard to really kinda take a side, I don't know. I mean, if it's an illegal immigration you can't really say much about it. I mean, there are proper ways to come into the country, but at the same time, it's like...I've heard you know people pinning everybody—it's kinda, people are taking it to an extent where it's more—it's just all, all immigrants, you know what I mean? [Like all immigrants are illegal?] Yeah, exactly. And I mean, working in the restaurant industry, you see a lot of people who are really, really working hard and you know, they'll get their workers permit and then they'll send their money back. And it's hard to, like seeing that, you know it's hard to like, "Oh yeah, you guys, you guys are terrible people... You're taking American jobs." They're helping their family out. Southwest University Male 22

Though this student seems to understand white perspectives about illegal immigration, he also points out how hard immigrants work in order to support their families. He points out that many whites believe that all immigrants are illegal and fail to see that many actually have work permits. There is also an assumption that Latinos are taking American jobs, when often the jobs they occupy are those that many Americans would not be willing to take. Latinos have also heard whites talk about how to handle this perceived problem of immigration. Two students from Southern

University overheard whites talking about building a barrier of some sort on the border, as well as more violent approaches.

I've heard some white guys, or white males, say that they should just all head on back and build up a wall. And have, and what'd they say, and have like army guys around the border to pluck them off or something like that. But yeah, which, I think "Ugh." I don't say anything, because America was founded by immigrants, but I have heard people say stuff like that. Southern University  
Male 18

Not only did whites believe that a wall should be built, but they also suggested that those trying to cross should be killed. His reaction was to not say anything, though he did seem to want to. Another student was surprised to hear whites at Southern University talking about building a fence on the border, because he assumed that the University culture was more tolerant.

*"It's Mexico's Problem."*

Another response whites had to immigration was to place the blame squarely on the shoulders of Mexico. Rather than looking at how the poverty in Mexico is related to the prosperity in the United States, whites are more likely to assert that if Mexico would just fix their problems, then immigrants would not come here. Prejudice is inherent in this comment, with the implication that people from Mexico are unwanted and that Mexico somehow chooses not to make things better there. There is also a complete denial of the impact that U.S. corporations have on the immigration patterns that exist. "A disturbing portion of its national wealth flows outside its borders each day and into the pockets of Wall Street shareholders. So much of that wealth has been siphoned off in recent years that the Mexican economy finds it increasingly difficult to feed and clothes its population" (Gonzalez 2000, 96-97). Corporations exploit Latino labor (with

low wages, lack of benefits, and the threat of being deported) and resources from Latin nations as Gonzalez points out. A few students I spoke with noticed this sentiment when whites talked about immigration. This first comment is from a freshman at Midwest University who experienced this in high school.

White people made comments and they didn't really mean to hurt other people, but they've been brought up that way, so that when they say it, it does hurt some people of Mexican or Hispanic culture. Because they don't realize that their family has sacrificed a lot to come to this country and then they just think "Oh, you know, they should go back. It's Mexico's problem...They should fix the problems before other people come here." And it's not that simple you know. We just don't come here because it's Mexico's problem. Midwest University Female 18

Though it is possible that whites hold their beliefs because of their upbringing as suggested by this student, they are also oversimplifying a complex problem. She points out that the choice to come to the United States is not an easy one. Additionally, she indicates that there are no easy answers to changing the current patterns of immigration. It cannot be boiled down to expecting Central and Latin American countries to solve their problems, as the next student articulates.

People don't really understand why people come to this country, and situations in Latin American countries and why those countries are in those situations in the first place. People don't understand the whole picture. . . We've been over, I think the U.S. has intervened in over 40 different governments throughout the history of Latin America. I mean, you see it and I don't know why people don't see it themselves. . . And it's just like this whole immigration thing stems from the United States. And, and the saddest thing is that the government doesn't care. The government does not care if a million people cross the border illegally next year. They don't. Because ultimately they're still getting paid and these immigrants are putting money back into their pockets. The only reason that they act like they care is because the voting bloc is for the [inaudible]. . . I think the problem really stems from the belief that this country is the greater, the greatest one with the most um, how am I gonna say this, the most, the country that really honestly cares about the situation of the world and bettering countries. And I

mean, you see time and time again, if there's nothing in it for the U.S., then the U.S. does not intervene. Southern University Male 22

Unfortunately, most whites do not have the extensive knowledge that this student does about the historical relationship between the United States and Central and Latin America. Because whites do not know the big picture, it is easy for them to ignore how the United States has been a player in creating the poverty in those countries which causes people to immigrate away from them. This student also talks about how he wishes that whites could see the benefit that immigration provides for the country.

### *Latino Views on Immigration*

Students also discussed how some Latinos also hold negative views on immigration. A student from Midwest University suggests that Latinos who embrace their culture are less likely to be anti-immigration than those who are more assimilated into white culture.

I have [heard] Latinos talking about, negatively about immigration issues. I think it's, for me, I'm on the other side of the fence. I'm on the pro-immigration, you know and I don't think that anyone would want to go toe to toe with me on that issue. Because I've done extensive research on it and I would hate for somebody to get into a discussion with me about it...But uh, I think that it's hard, because Latinos also see it as a negative issue. And I think that whites have always seen it as a negative issue. I don't think it's changed from 1980 to 2006. I think there's been more of a shift on how Latinos perceive immigration. And I think that Latinos who tend to try to assimilate into a main stream culture have more problems with the immigration issue. And, Latinos who are more prone to embrace their culture and affirm their culture and affirm their identity are more on the side of the immigration issue. So I see it more of a thing that's being debated by Latinos, because I think consistently whites have not been pro-active about the immigration issue, or pro-immigration. Midwest University Female 24

A student from Southern University noticed a similar pattern. Her point was that as Latinos become more assimilated or the longer they are in the country, the less likely

they are to support immigration. Additionally, she echoes the point that if Latinos are not aware of the history between the United States and Latin American countries, then they are likely to oppose immigration. This anti-immigration attitude from some Latinos also supports the white racial framework. Buying into white ideology allows people of color to more easily fit into the dominant culture and to be accepted by whites.

*Immigrants = Illegal*

A few students also commented on how when whites hear the word immigrant, they usually think “illegal immigrant,” which could also impact their views on policies.

Everybody thinks like a certain—A lot of it I think that, they think that all immigrants are illegal, I mean whether you immigrate—when someone says immigrant they assume that its illegal immigrants and they don’t always realize there’s a legal side immigration as well. Southwest University Male 21

A student from Southern University heard comments in a free speech area on campus like, “this is our country,” “you’re breaking the law,” and “Go back to where you came from” directed at Latinos. Similar comments were heard by other students off campus.

**Derogatory Names**

I asked students if they had ever been called derogatory names on campus. Most students had not experienced and instead talked about more subtle types of racism. Seven of twenty-six students that responded to this question reported having this experience, and three had not experienced it on-campus, but instead had experiences off campus. This finding was not entirely surprising considering the racial dynamics that exist in contemporary society. It is less likely that whites will be overtly racist towards students of color, because this type of behavior is not socially acceptable. However, a

few students did encounter more overt name calling both on and off campus. For example, a student from Midwest University talks about situations that occurred at her suburban high school and community college.

They'll call us beaners. Once was beaners and braisers. Um, they would say that we're dirty. That we don't you know keep the place clean. That we're ignorant. Uneducated. And they basically like make fun of, you know. I know when my parents try to speak English and have an accent, so they'll make fun of it. They'll pretend they don't know what you're talking about. Especially in the schools. I know there's a lot of prejudice with like the deans in schools, in high school and junior high, and you know the college. They're really hard on the minorities. And they kind of take the, you get in trouble if you do something. You get penalized more if you're Mexican. Female 21, Midwest University

Not only had she encountered being called names, but she also points out many stereotypes that whites hold about Latinos. More stereotypes will be discussed in the next section. Not only was she called names by whites and stereotyped very negatively, but her family members were also criticized for having accents when they spoke in English. This type of discrimination carries over into how Latinos are treated in schools. Latinos are penalized more harshly, which she supported with an example about how Latinos were treated if a fight broke out in school. Most of the time Latinos were arrested or suspended and whites did not experience such severe sanctions.

Another student from Midwest University shared a litany of names that he had been called on campus.

I've been called...landscaper, spic. The list goes on and on. [By other students?] By students and sometimes it would slip by a faculty member [Are you serious?] It's been said. Like "Oh, is there any landscapers?" Or even like little jokes, like, "I had to go rake my leaves yesterday. The landscapers didn't come over." And then they'd look. And I'm like "Yeah, I'm here getting education." [That is shocking—no one's really talked about faculty.] They have slipped and they do make the comments, and you pretty much can pick up what they're talking about. . . You get used to it after a while. Midwest University Male 21

As we can see, faculty members at this student's university were among the culprits of this sort of behavior. Feagin, Vera, and Imani also found this to be true from their interviews with African Americans (1996). Though this faculty member's behavior was somewhat less blatant, for this student the implication was crystal clear. Comments about landscapers reveal an underlying expectation that some faculty have about Latinos and their potential. This student seemed to wonder why this faculty member did not notice that he was in the classroom getting his education. Because of the frequency of this type of event, it becomes somewhat normative for the student. A student from Southwest University talks about how some of her friends use derogatory names when talking about Latinos, though the comments are not directed towards her.

Not to my face. I've heard people make comments, especially, and I feel bad always going back to my ROTC friends, but it's a really diverse group of people, so it's a good comparison. There's some people in there who say stuff. They're not being serious, but it's still like, "Come on now." [What kinds of things?] They'll just like, they'll be telling a joke and they'll use, you know, wetback or stuff like that. And maybe they don't think anything of it, because they think I'm white so they don't think it could be offensive. Southwest University Female 20

Because this student looks white and often people cannot tell right away that she is a Latina, whites feel comfortable using this sort of language around her. There is an assumption that they can get away with it, because they think there are no Latinos around. This student is able to witness how whites really feel about Latinos, because she is not easily identified as being a student of color. Though she is sure they are joking, it still bothers her.

Three students talked about similar experiences happening to them off campus.

In particular, one student talks about an encounter that his father had at his former place of work.

And as a matter of fact, my dad—he's told me this story a few times. Like when he first came out here, in the States, he first went to Miami. . . I remember one time he had this job and, like my dad didn't know English too well, so he wasn't, he couldn't really connect with like the Anglo people and stuff. But I think it was his boss, no, like a supervisor, and the guy would like say something nice and then all of sudden he would like tell him like "You spic" or something like that. And my dad, he didn't know what that meant. . . Until later on, I guess one of his coworkers told him, "You know what that means?" And he was like "Whoa. Wow". . . And you don't know how many times that guy said that to him. Like every little thing, like "Oh well, go to lunch, you spic." Or things like that. Everything would end like "you spic." Southwest University Male 20

Because this student's father did not fully understand English, his employer was able to get away with this very racist behavior. This student later said that his father would have done something about the situation, but he did not understand what the employer was saying. Whites can get away using this type of language when they think Latinos are not around, and also when they are in a position of power, which is what this account demonstrates. The white supervisor was also shielded from complaints about his behavior because of the language barrier. Stories like the ones shared by these students demonstrate that though racism and discrimination tend to be more subtle, overt racism is still alive and well.

### **Spoken and Unspoken Stereotypes about Latinos**

Students were asked to talk about stereotypes about Latinos that they have encountered from whites directly, as well as things that whites might believe to be true about Latinos but do not verbalize. Most of the students had directly heard or sensed



stereotypes about Latinos from whites, with only eight of twenty-eight not reporting that experience. In terms of things whites believe to be true about Latinos, but don't directly express, only three of the students who responded did not have anything to share.

Stereotypes had to do with Latino neighborhoods, their work ethic, and criminality, as well as other things. The stereotypes the students encountered were uniformly negative representations of Latinos and there were similarities in what whites verbalized and what they did not. Often, when Latinos had not directly encountered stereotypes from whites, they sensed white beliefs through white actions, things they overheard whites saying, and the ways Latinos are frequently portrayed in the media.

### *Criminality*

A few students talked about whites associating criminality when they think of Latinos. A Midwestern University student recalls comments made by a friend about her neighborhood, which is known for being predominantly Latino. Her white friend is startled to find out that she lives there because of impressions that she has about that area.

She's like "Because that's a really bad neighborhood!" And I'm like, I just kind of feel like I have to justify my neighborhood. I'm like yeah, it's bad but it's cultural, you know? We have culture in that neighborhood, so it's like, so what? And you know, I just felt like I had to speak. If I don't speak up and defend my neighborhood, then I don't think, you know, she'll just continue with that same idea that it's bad and you're going to get shot and die if you go through there. [What do you think that assumption is based on?] I really don't know. . . Like I've seen a lot of bad things happen, but it's not like everybody I know in my community is bad and doing something bad. Midwest University Female 21

What is demonstrated in her comment is the stereotype that areas that are predominantly minority are more likely to be crime ridden, despite the fact that crime

can happen in any area of a city. Additionally, not all people in that area commit crime, though the entire area becomes characterized by the actions of a few. She talks about how her neighborhood is never portrayed positively in the media, despite the good things that happen there, which feeds into this stereotype. A student from Southwest University talks about how whites assumed that he was a criminal because of his appearance.

A lot of them have misconceptions that Hispanics are like criminally minded. Like, they'll say, or they'll assume that just because you look a certain way like you're some thug criminal. If I had my license picture, I would show that to you, but I didn't bring it. But every time I show my license to somebody, I'm in a wife-beater, with long hair...you would not recognize me. And they say, and now they look at me and they're like "Oh you really grew up. You're such a good person." And I'm like "I'm not really changed. I just cut my hair." Just because I look the way I look. And I've seen that among Hispanics here, like sometimes they'll see, and if you make a certain face, you have a certain haircut, they'll assume you're a thug of some type. I've even been to the barber shop here and I've had individuals who are like staring me down, like they want to attack me, or they're afraid of me because they think that I'm part of a gang.  
Southwest University Male 26

This student's physical appearance caused the assumption that he was in a gang or had propensity to commit crimes. Because he cut his hair and looks different than how he is portrayed on his license, there is an assumption that he is now a better person than he was, though fundamentally he is the same. Other students did not have a direct experience with whites regarding criminality, but it is something that they feel that whites believe to be true about Latinos.

That we steal. That we steal from them. Um, that we like crime. That we're all in gangs and do drugs. And we live the way we live because we want to. You know, they don't understand that when our parents come here they usually come here because they don't have education. So it's harder for them to adjust here. And then get a good job and then have the American dream. And they end up

probably living in a ghetto or a bad neighborhood. It's not like they want to. It's just that they can't get out of that situation. Midwest University Female 18

Again we hear that whites assume that Latinos are criminals and that they live in poverty by choice. Wisely this student points out some of the obstacles that Latino families face when they immigrate to the United States and the limited options that can be available. Rather than taking these social forces into consideration, whites are more likely to believe that Latinos choose a life of crime.

### *Low Expectations*

While visiting one of the campuses where the interviews were conducted, I spent some time talking with a Latino administrator who assisted me in finding students to participate in the study. He shared a story about how racism can create obstacles to recruiting students to attend the university. An African American prospective student was on-campus and had an appointment to meet with a faculty member in the student's potential major. When the student knocked on the faculty member's door for their appointment, the professor told the student that he could not see them at that moment because he had a meeting at that time. What the faculty member did not realize was that the student at his door was there for that meeting. There was an assumption that the person of color at the door could not be the prospective student that they were trying to recruit. I share this story to demonstrate the low expectations that whites often have of students of color. Several of the Latino students I spoke with talked about this issue.

Not at Midwest University but at my brother's school, when I was applying for high school. Well, the high school I went to is college prep high school and then my counselor told me not to apply for that high school, because he said I wasn't good enough for it. And you know that really shocked me. It's like 'I'm gonna apply anyway.' So I did and I was accepted, but I don't think teachers and our

counselors should even say that to a student, right? They should be encouraging us to reach for, you know, whatever they want to do. . .Because our school's all Mexicans and, well a majority, and we had lower expectations. We weren't expected to go to a magnet school or something higher than the average school, community high school and that whatever high school. So I guess he thought I wasn't good enough for it. Midwest University Female 18

Though this incident did not happen at the university, it is a good example of whites expecting less from Latino students. For this young woman, she did not let the discouragement from her high school counselor dissuade her from applying to a college prep high school, but the situation was still very upsetting for her. A student from Southwest University talks about why whites have these low expectations.

Well, I think basically everywhere they think that Latinos aren't educated and they probably don't deserve to be educated, because they need to take on those jobs that other white people don't want to take. Maybe they don't think we should be here. Perhaps we don't deserve it according to them. But that's how I feel I guess. Southwest University Female 19

Whites may not believe that Latinos deserve to be educated, which is why they hold low expectations for these students. As this student articulates, whites may expect people of color to do the jobs they do not want to do, so an education would be wasted on them—they do not deserve to be at the university. Not only is there a sense that education is wasted on Latinos, but also that resources spent on them could be going to more deserving students.

That they're on financial aid. That they're taking up all the money and that they're the top ten percent rule. Just stuff like that I think. That they're not adequately prepared to come here and that um pretty much that you're on financial aid, you're using up money that other people should deserve and that you shouldn't be here, because there's someone out there that's better than you. Southern University Female 19

These stereotypes can have an impact on how Latino students view themselves.

One student talks about how the low expectations she encounters from whites causes her to question her own deservingness to be at the university.

I guess, just having a hard time adjusting. Um, but it's true. I feel, and maybe I've heard, and that's why I feel, that we aren't as smart. . .I, there's some people who don't even talk to me. And I've heard that they just look down on people coming from there and we're all Hispanic. Southern University Female 23

This student was accepted in a pre-professional program at her university, but she still felt as though whites did not expect much from her. Those feelings impacted how she felt about her own abilities. Additionally, a student from Southern University talks about why the stereotype that Latinos are less intelligent could be reinforced by the environment.

Well, I mean, a lot of it has to do that people aren't upfront gonna tell you any stereotypes. The only one thing I feel, like sometimes they don't think we're smart enough. But a lot of that is because they haven't been exposed to any Latinos. [Do you get that sense or did they say something directly?] I get a sense, but...they don't come out and tell me that. I get a sense of that. I think a lot of that has to do with the environment. I don't really think that they actually think that, it's maybe some logical thing that they came upon while hearing everybody around them. Seeing that all the Latinos were doing the fast food service. Male 22, Southern University

In the next chapter, there will be a discussion of the campus environment, especially in regard to Latinos being overrepresented in lower positions on campus.

This student talks about the impact that this can have on what whites believe about Latinos. When whites mostly see Latinos in fast-food or service roles, it can reinforce the stereotype that whites should not expect much from them.

A student from Midwest University talks about the sense that she gets that whites have low expectations of her, though no one has ever said anything directly. This

student gets that sense because of the actions of whites and the lack of questions she gets about her academic hopes.

I think that people don't really expect much from us, even though we are going here. And like, we're really trying really hard. Like every person I meet, I ask them like "What's your major?" Nobody ever asks me that when they meet me. But I ask everybody just because I want to know like, how should I relate to them? . . . So I kinda think people, they see us here on campus. Like we're walking around with our book bags and our books just like everybody else, but they don't really think like "Oh that person's going to be the next [inaudible] of whatever award or a judge for whatever court." But then we're expected to look at white people like they're going to be something when they leave here, you know? Like they've already got dentist written across their forehead. And I kinda think like it's not the same for us. It's kinda like we've got a question mark on our forehead. Like, "what are you doing here?" Like "what are you gonna do?" Like somebody's not going to walk past me and think like "Oh that girl's gonna be a lawyer when she leaves here." You know? But I can look, I'm expected to look at a white person like they're going to be a lawyer when they leave here. So yeah, that's how I feel. Midwest University Female 21

Sometimes it is not what is said, but what is *not* said that leads Latinos to believe that whites have stereotypes about them. Because whites never ask her what her major is, this student feels that they do not expect much from her, while at the same time, there is an expectation that whites will go on to achieve great things. For Latinos, that expectation does not exist, though they are at the same university, taking the same classes, and obtaining the same education. A student from Southwest University shared a story that again exemplifies what the previous student was referring too—the idea that Latinos do not belong at the university.

I guess—I don't know if this really fits in but kinda at work. It's a student employment position, but a lot of people who go there, not employees or anything, but the people who go there, they kinda assume that I'm just an employee. They don't think I'm a student who's going to school to try to do something better. They just kinda think I'm a low level employee. Which I am—but [but you're a student too.] Yeah, but they would just assume that I'm a low level employee who's not going anywhere or doing anything—that's where

I'll be. [Does that happen quite a bit?] I don't know if quite a bit, but it happens enough to where I notice, but I don't wanna say every single patient that goes in there. They'll ask me what I do there or something like that and I'll tell them I'm a student employee and they get the reaction of "Oh, you're a student!" you know, and then they ask "what are you going to school for," and just things like that and they didn't realize that I was a student. I never ask why but there's some assumption there that I wouldn't be a student. Southwest University Male 21

When whites do see Latino faces at the university, they do not expect them to be students, but instead employees. It did not occur to the whites coming into this clinic that this student was at the university to get an education. They assumed that his role was only as a low-level employee, rather than that he was trying to advance himself. Though in this situation whites do not directly communicate their low expectations of Latinos, it comes through in their assumptions about this student.

*"It was Always like Lazy..."*

Another stereotype that came up a lot in the interviews was the white perception that Latinos are lazy. Again, some students heard this directly from whites, while others predicted that that is how whites felt about Latinos. This student from Southern University talks about comments she heard in a class.

I think most of what I've heard has just been maybe in class discussion. Not necessarily like peers saying anything, but more like, this semester I'm taking African Politics and Globalization class. But we were talking about the whole immigration issue with the Mexicans from Mexico, um the illegal immigrants... We were talking about that issue and people brought up, not that, well maybe they were covering up, but they weren't necessarily saying that they had the stereotype, but they were saying that people have the stereotype that Mexicans are lazy. That Mexicans are just milking the system and stuff like that. Southern University Female 21

This student goes on to talk about how the comments were not directed at her and the she had never experienced a direct confrontation from whites about this issue.

However, it is interesting that whites held these views and expressed them in her class environment. Especially because she assumed that most of the people taking the course were relatively liberal in their thinking. Other students also heard similar comments.

That we're lazy, you know. That we don't, we don't really work for things. We want everyone to do everything for us. And just things like that, you know. Mostly centering around how we're lazy is what I've heard. [These are things you heard directly?] Not directly, but in discussions about stuff like that. I can't remember what class it was, but we did, and it might have even been in high school, but we did something like that. "Okay we're going to talk about this group and just say some stuff and stereotypes and stuff like that" and it was always like lazy. Southwest University Female 20

Comments were not directed towards this student but they were expressed by whites in her class. There is an assumption by whites that Latinos do not work for what they get and that they expect to get more than they deserve to have. A student from Midwest University sensed that her chemistry professor also held the belief that Latinos were lazy. Again, this was not something that was directly expressed, but his treatment of Latinos made this student wonder if he held those beliefs. Though she could not be completely sure, she noticed that he did not spend very much time working with students of color, leading her to believe that perhaps he thought less of them.

*"That We're Immigrants."*

Some students talked about the assumption that Latinos are not from the United States or that they are immigrants. This is another stereotype that they encountered from whites or felt that whites believed.

That we're immigrants. That we speak Spanish, because not all of us do! Some of us don't even speak Spanish. As a matter of fact, third generation, immigrant children don't even know Spanish. Um, that we speak Spanish, that we're immigrants, like with the Latinas like I said, that we're submissive. Um, and that's pretty much about it that I've encountered. Southern University Female 26



This student points out the assumption that not only are all Latinos immigrants, but that they all speak Spanish, which is not always the case. On the flip side, a student from Southwest University felt that whenever he spoke in Spanish, whites automatically assumed that he was not from the United States. So speaking Spanish somehow contributes to the belief that whites have about Latinos being non-citizens.

### *Low Income*

Another stereotype that Latinos felt whites believed was that all Latinos are poor or lower class. Several students commented on this stereotype.

Some white people believe that Latinos are like lower class. And that, they have these like these lower position jobs. And some, a lot of people might feel that Hispanics don't even talk English. I don't know where that came from! You know, things like that. Southwest University Male 20

A female student from Southwest University had a similar experience. Both noticed that whites held the belief that Latinos were poor, lower-class, and either did not speak English or knew how to speak it but refused to do so.

Well, definitely, that we're poor. Um, which you know may be true most of the time, but not always. That maybe we are behind I think, big time in—I know I am, verbally. Especially when I got here the curriculum was a lot tougher than what I was used to. And that maybe be due to that I went to a poor high school. So, a lot of it has to do with economic issues. And, and you know we're not up to the level educational-wise because of where we went to school. So that's how they view us. They may feel that, you know, they're smarter. And, and that may be true. They're, they obviously have more money and I guess in that sense, I don't know if they say it out in the open, but maybe subconsciously they feel more powerful. They feel like they're better. But uh, you know it just depends. Southern University Male 23

This student talks about how whites assume that Latinos are under-educated, which is sometimes the case but not exclusively the situation. He also points out the

impact that growing up in a lower-income neighborhood can have on how prepared Latino students are when they get to the university. Not only are Latinos behind because of the high schools they went to, but whites also can have a superiority complex because they are better prepared. Another student from the same university talks about the assumption that all Latinos are poor. He points out that some of the foreign exchange students from Latin American countries are actually some of the elite from their homeland, but that whites do not differentiate this. Because of the stereotype that Latinos are poor, he also noted that whites often assumed that all Latinos are at the university on scholarship. While this is the case for some students, it does not apply to all Latinos.

A couple of students talked about stereotypes about their families (that Latinos have a lot of kids), their food (that they only eat tacos and burritos), their political beliefs (that Latinos are always Democrats) and even their clothing. Almost all of the students could name a stereotype that either they encountered or felt whites believed to be true about Latinos. The students I talked to did not deny the fact that some Latinos are poor, some are underprepared for college, and some might be criminals. However, these overgeneralizations minimize the diversity of this group, as well as justify discrimination and racism. Negative stereotypes of people of color justify for the white majority that they belong on the top of the social order. Feagin makes the point that stereotypes rationalize racist behavior. Negative images are “false or exaggerated generalizations” that become part of our understandings of other groups (Feagin 2000, 106).

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Latinos face a great deal of discrimination on the individual level on their campuses. They encounter racism and discrimination in a variety of ways, including both overt and covert ways. Though some of the discrimination seems subtle from the outside, to the students I interviewed it is very obvious. White racism included accusing Latino students of filling a quota, rather than being academically qualified to attend the university; reacting with hostility towards the Spanish language; expecting Latinos to represent their entire race; assuming that all Latinos are immigrants and expressing negative views on immigration in front of Latinos; and expecting Latinos to conform to the majority, white culture. Some Latinos encountered unfriendliness once whites were aware that they were racially different from them.

Additionally, Latinos encountered a number of negative stereotypes about their group from whites. Stereotypes held about Latinos seemed to justify the lower standing that these students have at the university. White students use stereotypes to create a racialized order (whites are superior and deserving of an education, Latinos are not) and to “explain” why this structure should exist the way it does (because they feel Latinos are lazy or criminals or unintelligent.) Whites can rationalize their mistreatment of Latinos by using stereotypes, which has been demonstrated throughout this chapter. As has been shown, Latinos do face racism and discrimination on the individual-level on their college campuses in a variety of ways. Students also have a variety of ways of dealing with these incidents which range from accepting the behavior as normative and

thus unchangeable to directly confronting white racism. Next, I will explore how institutional racism and discrimination plays out on these campuses.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION ON CAMPUS**

Discrimination that involves “organizationally prescribed or community prescribed action that by intention has a differential and negative impact on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups” is known as direct institutional discrimination (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 16). Indirect institutionalized discrimination has to do with the practices of the dominant group in a society that regulate norms that end up impacting subordinate groups negatively though they were not intended to (Feagin and Feagin 2003, 16-17). Whether intended or not, institutional discrimination serves a purpose, which is to create, perpetuate, and maintain the racial hierarchy. Institutional discrimination often excludes people of color from access to institutions.

What is critical about institutional discrimination is its importance in maintaining white privilege. “The processes that maintain domination—control of whites over nonwhites—are built into major social institutions. These institutions either exclude or restrict the participation of racial groups by procedures that have become conventional, part of the bureaucratic system of rules and regulations. Thus there is little need for prejudice as a motivating force” (Blauner 2001, 20). In the color-blind transformation of society, institutional discrimination maintains boundaries without the need for overt racist practices. As it is no longer normative, nor legal, to blatantly discriminate against someone because of their race, society has adapted by utilizing institutional discrimination to exclude those deemed unworthy or undesirable. The Latino students I

talked with faced a number of cases of institutional racism. Their accounts demonstrate that though the institutions are admitting more people of color, they are still fundamentally white arenas.

### **Latino Concerns Addressed by University**

I asked the students a broad question in order to introduce the topic of institutional racism. Students were asked if they felt that Latino concerns were addressed by the university. I did not define what “Latino concerns” referred to, because I wanted to see how the students understood that themselves and to get at what types of issues were important to them.

#### *Circumstances Latino Students Face*

Many universities are historically white institutions. In contemporary society, they still tend to function with a white student body in mind. Often universities operate under the assumption that their student body will fit a particular model. Typically, there is an expectation that traditional students will be undergraduates who are 18-22 years old, will have some prior knowledge of what to expect from their college years (like from their parents or family members), and will be relatively free from obligations outside of the university. Some of the Latino students I spoke shared obstacles they faced at the university, because they do not fit this mold of what a college student should be.

When I asked this student from Midwest University if she felt that she was supported by the institution, she paused, and then started to cry. The lack of support she

felt was very emotional for her and the story of what she has been through already in her personal life was remarkable.

No. Not at all. As a matter of fact, right now—my tuition is still not paid for, and they're not doing anything about it. And it's really hard, because, like I don't know what I'm gonna do [starts to cry] I'm so sorry. . .Um, my step-dad he just passed away like from leukemia. And I don't live with my mom. I just moved out of my mom's house two months ago. And, I claimed to live with her as far as financial aid goes, because like, otherwise, they just make you go through so much more paper work. You know if you're a student that's gonna be living by yourself. And um, regardless I do help my mom, because she's not working. She's going through depression. My step-dad just died of leukemia. You know she kinda feels hopeless. My, my dad—he lives with my older brother. For the last like three years I've been taking him back and forth through rehab, because he has a really bad drug addiction and I'm the only one who cares about him. I've supported my brother and my father for like the last two years. And I just feel like all this pressure's on me because, I don't make enough money to do for them what I would love to do for them. I have my sisters and I have my younger brothers to think about so I never, I like never say no to them. If my mom needs anything or my dad or like, you know whatever time of night it is and my dad just kind of finds himself lost on the street once again you know I'm like, I'll be there for him. I'll pick him up. . .And so, I applied for financial aid and last year I claimed my two sisters on my income tax, because my mom wasn't working and I was supporting my sisters and I was living with my mom. And I just did it, you know, because I was supporting them. So now my financial aid won't go through because Midwest University needs proof that my mom didn't work. She already wrote them a letter and we've sent out like three requests to the IRS and they're barely now getting back to me since the beginning of the semester, the IRS. And they sent me a letter that the form that we sent them wasn't filled out right. So I sent them another one and I'm just like hoping it doesn't take so many months like it did. And I've gone through this numerous of times with Midwest University financial aid. And they're still, are not like trying to help me. And I just feel like, "Okay well I'm just trying to learn you know?" I'm trying to learn without worrying about my financial situation. Because it's a lot of stress...[No one's helping you here?] They're not helping me here at all. And I've spoken to a lot of people. I've wasted my cell phone minutes numerous of times like trying to talk to them. And they're like getting nothing done. Nothing. I check my status every day, my financial aid status on the computer, I check it every day. And they still have "Unfulfilled. Unfulfilled. Unfulfilled." And it's aggravating, its rough for me and it's like "Oh my God...the next semester is coming up! What am I going to do?" Midwest University Female 21

It was difficult to cut this student's comment short, because she had so much more to say. What I hope comes through though is the immense amount of pressure that this student was under. She was responsible for supporting many members of her family. She has been the care taker for her father in his addiction, her mother in her depression, and her younger siblings. The burden that this student brings with her to the university is above and beyond what many other students have to deal with. For her, the university was creating obstacles to obtain the education that she was working so hard to get and she felt as though she had no support. Financial aid gave her incorrect information and then followed that up by offering her little to no assistance in getting her tuition taken care of. Looming over her is the worry that she may be forced to unenroll due to non-payment or that she will not be able to come back in the spring. Like she says, she is "just trying to learn," but bureaucracy and perhaps an expectation that she should fit that "traditional student" mold is getting in the way of that. This creates even more stress for a student that is already stretched thin. Another student from Midwest University also talked about how family obligations can make it difficult for Latino students. If they have to go home to take care of their families, they do not always find support from the institution.

Other students of color similarly face a lack of economic resources when they come to the university. Students also sometimes lack cultural capital when they get the university. Bourdieu maintained that the educational system reinforces and legitimates the cultural experiences of the dominant class. Specifically, Bourdieu claims that schools play a role in sustaining power relations through "educational credentials,



selection mechanisms, and cognitive classifications” (Schwarz 1997, 190). Education is “an institution specially contrived to conserve, transmit, and inculcate the cultural canons of a society” (Bourdieu 1971, p. 178). It “reinforces rather than redistributes the unequal distribution of cultural capital” (Schwarz 1997, p. 191). And education “deflects attention from and contributes to the misrecognition of its social reproduction function” (Schwarz 1997, p. 191). In other words, the system is designed to reproduce existing inequalities that exist in society by valuing the values, practices and culture of dominant groups.

Because these practices become normative, they are not questioned. People without this capital may fail to gain access to the institution of education or once they do get in the door, may not know the “rules” of practice. Many of the students I spoke with were first-generation college students, and as we will see, at times they lacked the social and cultural capital to navigate successfully through the university. At the same time, because the university values the dominant group’s cultural capital, there was an expectation that students should fit a particular model. Some of the programs, departments, and behavior of those at the institution suggest that they expect students to be middle-class whites who bring the appropriate social capital. Those who do not fit that mold are often bound to struggle. Lewis found this to be true even at the elementary school level for students of color (2005), which shows that the reproduction of inequality in schools permeates at all levels.

A student from Southwest University talks about how the assumptions from the faculty can hurt Latinos in terms of their success at the university.

That's a tough question. Because, I don't know. I think a lot of times professors and stuff, they might um, I've never experienced this personally, but I've heard stories about people who are like "You know, I went in to talk to my professor and they don't, they're just not listening to me." They'll go talk to the professor and they'll say, "Oh, things will be okay" and then they fail the next test too and just stuff like that. I think maybe it's, we don't sometimes get the attention that we need. Because if we don't do well on the first test, "Oh well they didn't do well. Oh well, they're Hispanic so they probably have a tough home life and there's all this other stuff, so we'll just put them off over here and we'll just pay attention to these people here." You know, so it's, sometimes we get kinda brushed off, because people assume things about our race and it's—you know, most of the time it's not true. Because I know a lot of kids my age, Hispanic kids who live at home. They don't have any problems. They just have trouble with tests or something like that or have trouble with money like everybody does. And people just automatically put us over in this little group over here where "Oh, we'll just leave them over there and we'll help these other people first." So, that's kinda what I see. And not just necessarily with Southwest University, but everywhere in life in general. Southwest University Female 20

This student portrays another side of the issue of family matters for students. She points out that for some students, their family life is fine, but they struggle with testing or study methods. Rather than getting help that they need from faculty, she feels that these students are ignored, so they do not get their questions answered and then continue to do poorly in their classes.

#### *Needing More Information*

Other students also felt that they were not given the information that they needed to succeed in academia. Some of the students I spoke with were first generation college students, so they did not necessarily come to the university with prior information of what to expect. Universities do not always provide students with the knowledge of what resources are available to them.

They always could do more, you know it's not just having this program called [names program], that means Latin American Resource and it keeps going. They could do more. They could have more seminars talking about what to do with

Financial Aid, what to do with this and that. Everything is, for me, it's mostly ask—ask. Because I'm the first one going, coming to college or university, and it's like, nobody has ever done it before, so I'm not oriented to how its gonna work. And everything for me is like stressin' every week, because if I have a question, I have to call the department and get specifically to a person. And then that person doesn't know anything, so she'll direct me to the correct person. So I'm kinda used to that. [Like the run-around?] The run-around kinda thing. And, yeah they could do more. Midwest University Male 18

Though there is one organization that this student is aware of to assist Latino students on his campus, he still feels as though there is a lack of support for students. Instead of having information readily accessible to him, he feels he has to seek it out and when he tries to do that, he is often sent all over campus to find an answer. One of his peers had the same experience. Though there was some support available, it was up to students to find it. This could be a challenge for students who have limited cultural capital as first generation college students. How will these students how what help to seek? It's hard to know what you don't know, so students might not even know what kinds of questions to ask or what resources to seek. A student from Southern University shares a similar experience. Though she acknowledges that the university is making some efforts to help Latino students, she points out that “you have to really think about it and you have to really look for it.”

#### *Programs Meant to Help that Don't*

Ironically, programs that are designed by the institution to help students can have the latent effect of causing more problems. Students discussed this in terms of the design of specific programs, but more often in terms of how whites viewed those programs. The existence of assistance for Latinos justified the white belief that Latinos should not be at the university in the first place.

It's a program who brings high school students into Midwest University, but you have to take a summer bridge course. And it's an English and Math class to help you get up there. And then after that semester, your first semester, you have to take another English and Math class, that they don't count toward your GPA, because it's below the standard. But, you're also involved in taking another class which don't count either. So you're wasting 9 hours of your first semester, trying to catch up with everybody else. And what [Latino recruitment office] and other programs have been trying to do is get, give them credit for taking that time in the summer, which was 6 hours, plus those other 9 hours in the fall semester. So, a lot of times, the faculty does not allow or is not giving them credit for that. Which I think they should change it because entering into [that program] you're automatically going to be graduating in 5 to 6 years from Midwest University, because you have to take these extra classes that don't add up to your graduation.

Midwest University Male 21

This program is meant to help retain students by helping them get to the same level as other students if they went to high schools that may have underprepared them for college. However, students entering this program ended up taking 15 hours of course work that did not count toward their grade point average. Those courses are required, but basically count for nothing, which means that students have taken a semester's worth of credits that would not count towards graduation. The student continues by explaining that some students end up not persisting at the university when they start in this program, because it is taking so long to graduate.

A student from Southwest University talked about how programs that lump all Latinos into one category can also be problematic. Though in general he felt that there were programs to serve Latinos, he thought they should be more focused in on specific groups.

I think they're pretty open to things that concern Latinos, but, I think-kinda like, Latino to me is kind of the same as Hispanic. So you know, I think that they could work better on specific areas. For instance, you know, the whole Mexico-Chicano, what is it? Dash dash dash, but you know, it's just—so I mean, things like that. I mean instead of doing stuff like that, maybe you could have different,

you know a Mexican thing, a Chicano thing. And then you can focus more on that group or people who want to be in the group instead of throwing Latinos as a whole, having everybody in that group under one thing. Southwest University  
Male 21

This student is referring to a name change to the Mexican American Studies program. The new name included several labels associated with Latino students. By grouping all Latino students together, he indicates that some students may feel like they are not included. This was a key issue in this state particularly, because of the unique identity issues that exist there. Students identified their race as Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American, and Spanish just to name a few. So in some ways the name change was meant to address the various ways that students identify. However, it can still be excluding. Students I spoke with in a focus group prior to conducting the formal interviews also talked about this phenomenon. There was an office on this campus with the purpose of extending advising and support to Mexican American students, but since these women did not identify that way, they did not feel that the services were meant for them.

A Southern University student talked about how she felt that the university did not meet Latino concerns with one exception. There was one space on campus where she felt like she was supported by the university, which was its Mexican American Studies center.

I agree with that completely. The only thing that I think would go against that would be the establishment of the [Mexican American Studies center] on this campus. Granted, it's about a two room office that we've got. Very small. I'm not sure if the funds that are given to that center are the same as the funds that are given to other centers on campus. But um, even walking into the department, you know that we're cornered. We're literally in a corner of a building and it's physically reinforces what's happening at the institutional level. . .[Is (Mexican

American Studies center) solely responsible for outreach and programming for Latino students on campus?] What has happened, um, they focus more on just the academic perspective. But what they do offer is just a space. So students who feel the marginalization on campus, just walking through campus, that's a place where they can go, and just put their bags down, relax, do their homework, talk to people. It's a very comfortable environment for us to be in. A very home-like environment. . . So um it's definitely a welcoming space. Southern University Female 26

Though this program is actually helpful for students, the physical location of the space was interesting. The student points out that the office itself is very small and located in the corner of a building. To her, this is symbolic of how she feels Latinos are treated on campus. This space is important in terms of welcoming students and giving them a place that is truly for them. But, this student is concerned that the office is not well funded and that the advisor there may be overwhelmed in being one of the few supports for Latino students.

About eleven students responded that they felt the university was meeting Latino needs and concerns or did not mention any issue they had had in this regard. In order to get a better sense of how institutional racism plays out on these campuses, I asked the students a series of more specific questions about the university. Some of the students who felt the university was meeting Latino concerns also noted ways that the university could be perpetuating institutional racism.

### **Symbolic Representation**

We have already heard from one student how important it is for Latinos to have a space where they feel welcome and how the physical location of that space can send a message about how the institution views this group. I asked students to talk about whether or not they felt that Latinos were represented symbolically on their campus.

Symbolic representation could include things like statues, celebrations, campus publications, and so on.

*Location, Location, Location*

A few students talked about the location of symbolic representations of Latinos. For example, Southern University did have a few spaces dedicated to Latinos, one of which was discussed previously, but often these spaces are in out of the way locations.

We have a wonderful Latin American Studies Department. The problem with that is it's located...is the area where the law school is at and Latin American Studies is. So, if I'm just walking around campus, I'm not gonna walk into the [names library,] which is the Latin American and, the Library for Latin American Studies. I'm not just gonna walk in there and look at the stuff. When I do go in there, it's beautiful stuff. But this not a centralized part of campus, so when am I ever gonna do, when am I ever gonna be on that side? When is anyone ever gonna be on that side of campus? Um, statues, I mean we're very fortunate here to be getting a Cesar Chavez statute, which took forever to get. We'll have that in the spring. And then the Mexican American Studies um...is really small. It's very hidden, in a sense. It's not like it has its own building. It's like fourth floor in the [names building]. We have like a Chicano culture room in the [Student Union,] which like one room. It's very nice, but it's, you know, I mean there's very little. And when it does, the things that do exist aren't out there for us to see. That doesn't just affect us as students, that affects the hundreds of thousands that probably come here every year and wander around campus, get tours and you know, what are they really seeing? Southern University Male 22

There are three places on the Southern University campus where this student feels that Latino students are represented. One is very small and hidden away, and as another student mentioned "cornered" in the building. Another is a very small space in the student union building. And the last one is not centrally located on campus, making it space that many undergraduate students would not see or go to, because it is so far away. This is a detriment for Latino students at Southern University, but it also has an impact on anyone who visits the campus. As this student points out, how is the campus

represented? For anyone stepping foot on campus, the symbolic representation would indicate that Latinos are not very important. Perhaps that image will change when the campus erects the Cesar Chavez statue that has been in the works.

On the other hand, a student at Midwest University talks about the lack of any sort of representation for any groups on campus. There are very few statues on this campus and not much artwork. She does note that there is one place on campus where she has seen Latino art displayed.

Well now that you mention it, I've never seen a, I guess a Latino symbol or anything like that. Or a Mexican symbol on campus. [Are there statues on campus?] That's another thing. I haven't really noticed any statues in general, but at the same time, I'm sure there's not, I'm just saying this I don't have any evidence backing this up, I'm sure there's not Asian symbolic or hero, or Native American. I haven't really seen anything to be honest. [For any group?] Yeah. But I do know in the, um, there's a department in the, what's it called? The Student Service Building. It's [names Latino student support office.] I know they have artwork in there. And I think in the stuff, but that's in that little department. [In a specific department?] I think I've seen paintings. Yeah, I would say so, I think I saw in the office yeah. Midwest University Female 23

If a Latino student knows where to look on this campus, they might be able to find at least a small amount of representation of their culture. Again, we see though that this can only be found in one small office on campus.

### *Old White Males and No One Else*

A few students from Midwest University talked about which group was mostly represented on their campus. For these students, the faces they do see are primarily old, white males.

Well, because I'm in the med school, no one's really represented except for old white males. Their pictures are on the wall and there's no females and there's no one of color of any sort. [chuckles] And then, for the statues, there's not very many, but there's not much artwork or anything. All the publications—well, I



mean that's who runs this school, so those are the people who are in those things.  
Midwest University Female 24 medical student

In the medical school, only white men are represented on the walls and in publications. Women and people of color are nowhere to be found. This representation continues in other areas of the campus as well.

You should walk down towards the train station. They have a whole array of different people who have been influential in the world, in the U.S. Absolutely zero. I mean nothing when it comes to Latino representation on one of those things. Nothing. It's incredible. I'm like, it's so disheartening and it's so unmoving. And it's very hard to, to swallow. You look at it and you're like "Are you serious?" I can think of four Latinos off the top of my head in like five seconds that you could have been put up there that would have been qualified. Why not, you know? And that is an issue, it is an issue. Midwest University Female 24

When Latinos are not included in an exhibit about great contributors in the United States, it sends a message about the importance of Latinos in our cultural heritage. For this student, it is "disheartening" to find out that the University does not deem any Latinos worthy enough to be in that display, though he could think of a number that should be presented there. This is another example of white dominance at work at the university. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital is especially relevant when observing the choices universities make about symbolic representation on campus. "Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or other services of others" (Schwartz 1997, 43.) This type of capital legitimates the existing power structures. On a university campus, when whites are the only one's represented symbolically, it transmits a message that they are more important, valued, and should be recognized. When other groups are not seen, it sends the message that they do not deserve the same degree of recognition or

deference. As we will see from the next set of comments, this representation has become normative.

I've never looked at the yearbook, but I mean everything's, it's really. You know what I think it is. I think it's really hard to say we're not represented, because that's just how it's always been. So then, to me it's normal. I know that sounds really just weird, but I mean to me it's just normal that we're not represented and you have to take that extra step by being involved in different organizations that promote that and by educating people and by standing up for what you, for you believe in. Southern University Female 19

Because Latinos have not historically been represented, it is normal to this student that they would not be at the university. For this student, it is up to Latinos to get involved so that the university would make these changes. Another student demonstrates the how normative this lack of representation is in a different way.

I don't really see Latinos faces or statues around campus, but it's mainly because we probably don't have people to put up like that, at least on the national level. Maybe in the regional level. I can't think of anything you know, other than Cesar Chavez that really stands out or, or people like that. But I mean, you're not gonna put a statue of Jennifer Lopez [inaudible.] So, I mean, I don't see why. I mean, I think the statues that are up here, they represent a specific, time period of history in the United States. Cesar Chavez is one of them, so they're gonna put a statue, but other than that I just can't see any national figure, and that's probably the reason why. I don't think they're trying to exclude Latinos from going up in artwork or statues. Male 22, Southern University

This student is unaware of other Latino figures that could be represented on campus, unlike the student at Midwest University who could think of a number of them. Perhaps this lack of knowledge for the Southern University student has to do with how Latinos have been represented in other ways, for example curriculum or the mass media. A student from Midwest University talked about her frustration that she did not know a lot about her history until she took college courses. It is possible that the lack of discussion

about famous Latino figures makes it normative that there are not many who *should* be represented.

### *Institutional History*

A student from Midwest University commented that often the images of the campus that she notices are those that portray the early days of the university.

I don't like the fact that they have like the artwork in that building, like in the student services building. It's all white. Like from when the university started, like in the [cafeteria, ] there's no art like when you're, it's all. You see videos of like when the university started. Why is it when the university started? Everywhere you go it's like about the white people. . I do, because in the assignment notebook, if you go through, I have it, I bought it. And in every page, it's about when the university started again. And it's all white people. Like when, white cheerleaders, white little kids you in the boat. Why don't they do artwork about now? About how the university looks now? Why does it have to be, why are they stuck on when the university started? Is it because there was only white people back then, you know what I mean? So yeah I would say that in art and like pictures and the assignment notebook, that's what it is. There's no like Latinos or African Americans. Female 21, Midwest University

Though originally this student felt that the university did represent Latinos well, as she thought about it more, she realized that mostly whites were portrayed. When historically white institutions only represent portrayals of the past, then people of color will be excluded from those images. I do not think this student would argue that the college should not display its history, but it needs to go beyond that and also show the college as it is now—more diverse.

This student from Southern University discusses the reflections of past racism on her campus today.

Then going around campus and knowing that names of the buildings, they're named after Confederate soldiers and people that lynched people and actively, you know, were very involved with white supremacy movements. That—I don't know. It's very disheartening. And that's just looking at names of buildings. Of

course, you go and you look at the art, you don't see your own colors there, you know, represented Latinos. You don't see anything that has any sort of indigenous look to it there. So you know that a culture outside of your own is being reinforced. Southern University Female 26

Confederate leaders are somewhat glorified on this campus, which can make students of color feel excluded and unwanted. She goes on to talk about how even when there are events, for example she mentions an event to celebrate Cesar Chavez day, culture is still misrepresented. She mentioned that salsa music was being played and that students were not allowed to say the phrase "Viva la Rasa," which Chavez is known for. Her impression was that Latinos get lumped together, which does not accurately allow people to have their group represented and feels that this misrepresentation is forcing an assimilationist perspective from some Latino organizations on campus. She felt that this occurred as an effort not to offend white students.

Another student from Southern University told me a disturbing story about how institutional history impacts one residence hall on campus.

Like the way that they sold the university as this utopia of diversity. And then coming in here and definitely seeing things that just make you think like "what's going on?" A perfect example is like [Names Dorm,] which, back in the day was kinda like the segregation dorm. The black and Latino students, well, male students, were like, it's literally like so cut off from. There's two major areas, dorm areas, one on the Northwest side of campus and then the one on the south side. And [Names Dorm] is like on the Northeast, like totally away from everything. And then seeing, going, I had a really good friend who lived there. Seeing like the racial composition of [Names Dorm] was like pretty upsetting, because seeing like everyone I knew that lived there was dark, darker brown. [It's still segregated?] Yeah, and I think like, I don't even know why it still exists period. And don't get me wrong, there are white students there, but just like the numbers, you know. . .[So there's still this segregated dorm on campus?] Yeah, it's like, at least, probably more than a 10 minute walk to the eating areas. So like you know, you could imagine students that have to walk, you know from that dorm all the way to the eating areas on campus. It's just, it must be incredibly inconvenient. Southern University male 22

There were some white students that lived in this residence hall, but as this student points out that most of the residents are people of color. In the past, this residence hall was used to segregate students of color and it is functioning in the same way today. Students who live there are at least 10 minutes away from main campus, meaning that they are significantly set apart from the campus. Additionally, according to the school's newspaper, this residence hall was named after a "law professor who was a co-founder of the Florida chapter of the Ku Klux Klan" (Hermes 2004). So not only are students of color kept away from campus if they live there, but they also reside in a place named after a racist. The namesake of this building is quoted as telling this disturbing story:

I was staying at the hotel in my town when one morning a lady came in apparently quite frightened and in tears. I asked her what troubled her. She said she had been insulted by a negro. Ascertaining the name of the negro I seized a barrel stave lying near the hotel door and whipped that darkey down the street and into the Freedman's Bureau (Russell 2006.)

Continuing to embrace this man, regardless of his contributions to the university in the past, degrades students of color. Additionally, segregating students of color into a residence hall named after this man serves only to add salt to the wound.

About thirteen of twenty-seven respondents did not report that symbolic underrepresentation of Latinos was an issue on their campus. Some of them pointed out the lack of diversity in terms of representation in general, so they did not feel that Latinos were being targeted, but rather that no groups were well represented. A few students talked about how representation did occur because of active student groups. Several of the students from Southwest University did not see this as a problem on the

campus and instead noticed that the university did have symbolic representations of Latinos, which we might expect given its location in the Southwest part of the U.S.

### **Under-representation of Latino Faculty**

A huge problem that came up on all three campuses was the lack of Latinos holding faculty and higher administrative positions. Almost universally, students talked about a lack of Latino faculty on their campuses. Only one student of the twenty-eight who responded to this question did not report this as a problem. This under-representation played out in a number of ways. Latino faculty were often non-tenure track and often only teaching in specialized areas. Additionally, some students had not taken a class with a Latino faculty member even once during their time at the university. Almost all of the students saw this as a problematic. The observations made by these students are also supported by the actual number of Latino faculty members at each institution, as you can see in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Faculty Racial and Ethnic Composition

College	Latino	White	Total
<i>Tenure/Tenure Track</i>			
Midwest University	63 (4.8%)	983 (75.5%)	1301
Southern University	97 (5%)	1548 (81%)	1911
Southwest University	119 (10.7%)	860 (77.1%)	1114
<i>Nontenure Track</i>			
Midwest University	31 (4.5%)	504 (72.4%)	696
Southern University	59 (6%)	762 (84%)	904
Southwest University	272 (13%)	1552 (73.7%)	2107
<b>Total Midwest U</b>	94 (5%)	1487 (74.5%)	1997
<b>Total Southern U</b>	156 (5.5%)	2310 (82%)	2815
<b>Total Southwest U</b>	391 (12.1%)	2412 (74.8%)	3221

*Source:* Data comes from information gathered by each university. Data for Southern University and Southwest University is from 2006. Data for Midwest University is from 2005.

At Midwest University, Latinos make up 4.8 percent of the tenured faculty and 4.5 percent of the non-tenure track faculty. Whites make up 75 percent of tenured faculty and 72 percent of non-tenured faculty at the same University. A similar pattern is seen at Southern University, with Latinos making up 5 percent of tenured faculty and 6 percent of non-tenured faculty. Over eighty-percent of the faculty at this university were white. Recall that at Midwest University and Southern University, the student population is about 14 percent Latino. The state where Midwest University is located is 14 percent Latino, according to the 2005 census information. For this university, Latino students are represented compared to their representation in the population. Latino faculty are underrepresented compared to the state population. The situation is different for Southern University. Latinos make up 35 percent of the population of this state, so

both students and faculty are underrepresented compared to their share of the population. Southwest University has the greatest percentage of Latino faculty members at 10.7 percent for tenured and 12.1 percent non-tenured. Whites made up almost 75 percent of the faculty at this university. Latino students at this university make up thirty-five percent of the population. Again, we see that Latino faculty members are underrepresented when compared to the proportion of Latinos students. When looking at state level data, the gap is even wider. Latinos are 43 percent of this state's population. The underrepresentation of Latinos and overrepresentation of whites does not go unnoticed by the students I spoke with.

*“Yeah, They’re Mostly White Men.”*

Many of the students reported that they had not had a Latino faculty member in their time at the university and that most of their professors were white. A student from Southwest University, which has the highest proportion of Latino faculty among the three, had not yet had a course taught by a Latino faculty member.

I think that that does happen. There probably aren't that many Latina professors or working as the dean or something like that. And there are more cooks and janitors that are Hispanics or—[Have you had any Latino professors?] No, I haven't. [How do you feel about that?] I hadn't really thought about it, but I would like to have a professor who has similar, I guess, cultural background as me. That could connect more I guess, but I haven't really noticed. Southwest University Female 19

This student touches on an issue that will be discussed later on, which is the overrepresentation of Latinos in lower campus positions. However, she also points out the possible benefit of having a Latino faculty member, which is the connection that she could have with that person. A student at Midwest University actually added a Latino



Studies major so that she would have the opportunity to work with Latino faculty that she could more closely relate with.

The one thing that is problematic on this campus, and I'm surprised that they haven't talked about it, is the white professors. We have tons of white professors and we don't have a lot of representation on campus. I think that departments like the sociology department, like the Latin American Latino studies department have been fighting for more representation. More tenure. More graduate faculty. That's been very problematic for us here at this campus. And it's something that's been struggled by professors, as well as students. Um, I think that Latino students are having a problem and I would say black students should talk about it as well. But that that there is no proper representation on campus, and so you don't have that connection with your faculty, with your professors who are campus, because you don't really see that they can relate to you in anyway. And that was the most problematic thing for me in the psychology department and the reason why I had to take on a second major, is, because I felt I had no representation in the psychology department. The one person that is a Latina in the psychology department never returned any of my emails, any of my phone calls, any of my messages. Nothing. Uh, so I felt that [was that person overtaxed?] Definitely. She's a dean. . .she's also doing like tons of research and has like how many research students that she works with. So, then, you know, she's pretty much off hands. You know like, there's no way of getting to her. And that was very problematic for me. It was very problematic for me because the professors that we have in the psychology department here that are white, there is no involvement with me, there is no warmth for you. Midwest University Female 24

This student brings up a few very important points. One is the disconnection that she felt with white faculty members in her department. She felt that she could not relate to the white professors and that there was a lack of concern from them that she would succeed. At the same time, the one Latina faculty member in the psychology department seemed to be inundated with responsibilities, which made it impossible for this student to work with her. Because of that lack of connection, this student chose to pursue a second major in a department where there were Latino faculty members that she could relate to.

A student from Southern University talked about how the lack of Latino faculty has another negative consequence for students of color. Not only do Latino students miss out on having a connection to faculty, but they also lack Latino role models

Yeah, there's not many Hispanics. I don't know if I've ever had a Hispanic teacher. Um, pretty much everybody's Caucasian. Or, I had a professor in economics, who was from out of the country, but I don't think I've ever had a Hispanic teacher. I think I've had more African American teachers or professors or assistants than Hispanic now that I think about it. Yeah, so I don't think there's many Hispanic role models here that I've been, that I've noticed. Pretty much everybody is Caucasian that works here. Female 19, Southern University

Having faculty members that look like them, perhaps that have had similar experiences as these students, and that can relate to Latino students is important. Latino faculty members could serve as role models for students of color and demonstrate to them that they can go beyond what is expected of them by whites. One student from Midwest University speculates that "if we had more of that we'd be more worried not to drop out because we'd feel that support." Perhaps with a stronger connection to faculty and the presence of strong role models, more Latino students would persist at the university. Several other students talked about this issue as well, showing the extensiveness of this problem on all three campuses.

#### *Non-tenured Faculty*

Students noticed that when they did have Latino faculty, many times these teachers were not in tenure track positions. Often they were either graduate students or non-tenured faculty.

I have one Mexican, I know he's Mexican. He's Mexican and he's my teacher for sociology. But I'm pretty sure he's still an undergrad or in graduate school. [So he's not a professor?] Yeah, he was a graduate student most likely. I think he's really cool and he seems to like be really involved with the happenings of

Latino students. And he seems to really care and, you know, that's cool and everything. And I feel like the class is easier. Like, I wanna take like, if I have to take another sociology class, I want to take it with him. Like that's how I feel, you know?. . . And, but all my other teachers are Caucasian, white, um, males and females. And they are like typical teachers... And like, I feel like they're all like, really, like not exciting, like really plain teachers and like compared to him. His class is really fun. Like I always speak in his class. Always! My other classes not so much. . . But yeah, I don't see them represented. Like other teachers, like I don't know the teachers that well, but I only happen to be seeing like these white men, beards, and vests, suitcases. Midwest University Female 21

The only Latino faculty member that this student had in a course was a graduate assistant. What is also interesting about her account is the difference in her classroom experience when she compares the course with the Latino instructor and her other "typical" white instructors. Her sociology class seems easier to her, most likely because she feels like she can participate in this class to a fuller extent than in her other courses. This instructor is able to spark her interest in the subject to the point where she wants to take more courses with him. Perhaps she can connect more to this instructor and feels more comfortable in those classes.

A student from Southern University discusses the issue of tenured faculty. As the previous table showed, Latinos are a small percentage of the tenured faculty at all three of the universities.

I think it's really bad when somebody can say I've never had a Latino professor in my classes, besides like cultural classes. Um, I've had Latino professors in, you know, my [general education] classes, my math classes. I've been very fortunate. But again like, there's no, I can't remember a black professor that I've had at all. Period. And as far as the tenure system, you don't see very many professors at Southern University, Latino or Latina that are tenured. So, that's another issue we have. There's a very wonderful professor who's probably considered, I think she was like the top three Latino or Latina columnist in the world. She was denied tenure. They passed all of the normal channels and then we it got up to administration, to the final four people that make the decision, she was denied. So. [Do they know why?] They never told us why. Like we set up

meetings with them and to review the system and how stuff happened, but I mean ultimately like, you know it's just, once you don't get tenure at this university like, [inaudible] because you can't move up. Southern University Male 22

Though it is not clear why this faculty member was denied tenure, and probably difficult to find out, the student seems to wonder if her race was a factor. Though he finds himself lucky to have had a number of Latino faculty members, he is also frustrated by the lack of tenured Latinos. Another student from the same university talks about another Latina who was not granted tenure. (I should note that I'm not sure if they are talking about the same person, though it seems that they are not.)

I specifically had a situation where I had a professor, that was Latina, and she was very—I thought she was brilliant. . . A lot of the research she was doing was on, I think, this very thing, on wealth and inequality of Latinos in the U.S. And, I mean I took a couple of her courses and I really thought she did a great job. She even started this program where, you know, help promote financial literacy to the community and things like that. So I was really into that program and I really looked up to her. And I found out she didn't get tenure here. She's now teaching at Arizona State. But, I don't know, it was something that I kinda felt that wasn't right, because I thought her research was great, but I mean I'm sure there was other issues into that so. I don't really see much Latino faculty, other than her. Southern University Male 23

Again, we see a Latina being denied tenure and therefore having to leave the institution. For this student, he lost someone that he admired and who piqued his interest in this subject. Though he is not sure why tenure was denied, he admits to feeling that something was strange about it. He also talks about how he did have a few courses in Mexican American studies that were taught by Latino graduate students, so we again see the pattern of students taking courses with non-tenured faculty members.

*Specialized Latino Related Fields*

Often when Latino students did have faculty members that shared their racial background, they were in courses that were in specialized fields related to Latinos. In fact, at least eleven of the twenty-eight students interviewed mentioned this phenomenon. Latinos were teaching courses in Spanish, Mexican American or Latino studies courses, and similar areas.

Like from when I came here, the professors that I've had, they're white. Yeah like in the science department, they're mostly white. And um, but in Latino Studies department, which I've taken a lot of classes, they're Latino. Sociology, there's, it's pretty diverse I would say. Female 21, Midwest University

For this student, the only Latino faculty members that she's had have been in courses in the Latino Studies department on her campus. Her major is sociology where there is more diversity in the faculty, but she has noticed in other departments it has been mostly white, for instance science. Four students from Southwest University reported only having Latino faculty members for Spanish courses, which is somewhat surprising considering that this university has the highest proportion of Latino faculty members of the three (though it is still a small number compared to the white share of the faculty.)

One student shares her thoughts on how it is that her only Latino professor was teaching a course about Latino history.

I would just say, just my professor for my Latin American studies course. And I was actually thinking about that the other day. . . I was like "I wonder if they hired him to teach Introduction to Mexican Studies course because he was Mexican." Because I know he's a history major. Or Masters in history, he's trying to get his Masters, or his Ph.D. I'm not sure. But I was just like, he could have taught, I think he said he could have taught like any history. And that was a question that was in my head. I'm like "Well maybe, why did he just specifically choose this to teach?" I mean that's great in a way, because he obviously knows about the culture and everything. But at the same time it's like, do they feel that

only a person like that has, like a Mexican person has to teach that and nothing. Like maybe, is he gonna have a chance to teach something else? Midwest University Female 23

This student asks an interesting question. Was this person hired to teach Mexican Studies because he was Mexican? Or was he interested in Mexican Studies because of his race? It creates more questions as well. Though the student appreciated that he was teaching this subject, she also wondered if he was teaching this course because the department was not giving him a chance to teach other things.

A student from Southern University also notices a similar trend. She has not had Latino instructors in her major, which was accounting, but had courses from Latinos in specialized courses about Latinos or other people of color.

Well, I've had one Hispanic, but that's because she's teaching Mexican American studies. Um, I'm trying to think. I have one, I think she's Asian. I don't think it's well represented. You don't really see many. One, you don't see many women in faculty. Second, you're not gonna see many women of color. Thinking in general. I know very few and the ones that do I think they teach, I mean like, they don't teach like accounting, you know what I mean? I think the courses that they teach are gonna be like Minority Leadership or things of that nature. Which is great, I'm not saying it's not, but I think that as far as like if you're talking about like biology or math or science, I don't think it's very well represented. Southern University Female 19

Another student from the same university who had been at the university longer also had only one Latino professor. Again, it was a specialized Latino course.

I'm a government major, I'm a finance major, I'm minoring in accounting, and um, I've only had one Latino professor and that was Latino politics. Mmm hmm, it was Latino Politics. And uh, I haven't had a TA that's Latino either. Uh, yeah, only Latino Politics... Male 22, Southern University

The lack of Latino representation on university campuses as faculty members contributes to institutional racism. Whites represent the majority of the faculty on all three

campuses, which helps maintain the university as a white space. Latino students struggle to find role models that they can relate to on the faculty. This is especially the case if they decide not to take Spanish or courses related to Latino Studies. A few students had never had a Latino faculty member, while others have only had non-tenured instructors that may or may not stay at the university. Related to that, students raised questions about the tenure process and how it is that Latinos are concentrated in certain areas of study. Finally, they talked about the consequences of this underrepresentation. Some felt that they would be more likely to persist at the university if they had more contact with Latino professors. There would be more role models for them, as well as more support from someone that they can relate to. Students did talk about support they got from some Latino administrators, including a few from higher level positions as well as advisors and lower administration positions. However, most of the Latino faces that they see on the campuses are people working in lower level positions at the university, which is the topic that will be explored next.

### **Over-representation of Latinos in Lower Positions**

Students on all three campuses noticed an overrepresentation of Latinos in lower positions. When we look at the actual numbers of Latinos working in various positions on these campuses, we can see that the students' observations match the reality (Table 6.2.) At Southern University, as the prestige of the position decreases, the percentage of Latinos increases. Whites make up 83.5 percent of the management positions, compared to Latinos only occupying 8.3 percent. On the other hand, Latinos make up 52.3 percent of service and maintenance positions at this university versus only 27 percent of whites

in those positions. The data for Midwest University separated Non-teaching academic professionals from support staff, so it is difficult to tell if the job categories used here are the same as at Southern University. Additionally, it was difficult to find out which jobs when into these categories. The table only includes the support staff numbers for Midwest University. Regardless, we still see a similar pattern. There are more whites in management positions than Latinos, and more Latinos in service and maintenance than whites. Unfortunately, this data is not available at Southwest University. The only information available had to do with full-time and part-time work. I spoke with a faculty member who works on diversity initiatives on this campus and he informed me that the information is difficult if not impossible to get.

**Table 6.2 Staff Racial and Ethnic Composition**

College	Latino	White	African American	Asian American	Native American	Total
<i>Management</i>						
Midwest University	25 (16%)	65 (41.4%)	58 (37%)	9 (6%)	0 (0%)	157
Southern University	59 (8.3%)	590 (83.5%)	45 (6%)	11 (2%)	1 (<1%)	706
<i>Service/Maintenance</i>						
Midwest University	25 (16%)	65 (41.4%)	445 (62%)	6 (<1%)	0 (0%)	714
Southern University	558 (52.3%)	287 (27%)	183 (17%)	35 (3%)	3 (<1%)	1066
<b>Staff Total Midwest U</b>	844 (17.3%)	1315 (27%)	2100(43.2%)	597 (12%)	10 (<1%)	4866
<b>Staff Total Southern U</b>	<b>1685 (19.7%)</b>	<b>5844 (68.1%)</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>8571</b>

*Source:* Data comes from information gathered by each university. Data for Southern University is from 2006. Data for Midwest University is from 2005.



As students reflected on this pattern, their responses fell into a few categories—students who noticed this pattern and thought it was problematic, students who noticed it but did not think it was something to be concerned about, students who did not have a strong opinion either way, and students who did not notice this issue at all. Only four students did not report noticing an overrepresentation of Latinos in lower positions.

*Yes and It's Problematic*

A number of students discussed how it is problematic for them to see Latino faces only in lower level positions on campus. Many of them also noted that African Americans were also found in service and maintenance positions.

Pfft. There are tons, tons of African Americans in very low positions—janitors, cashiers, servers. I actually do not see a lot of Latinos here on campus, working here. I see more of an African American population working here. If it's working in the fast food place, or again as a janitor or as a server. And I really don't see, there is really definitely an overrepresentation of minorities, I would say, in the lower level positions. I see more of the Latinas in desk jobs, like secretaries, receptionists. I've seen some Latino janitors, I've seen some Latino security officers and maintenance. Mostly Latinos, they do maintenance.  
Midwest University Female 24

This student has noticed a predominance of African Americans in food service at her campus. She also saw Latinos working as janitors and maintenance and also holding some clerical positions. Another student also made this same observation, as well as noting that there were not many whites in lower level positions.

Oh yeah, I do see that the campus does have this, just on minorities in general, you won't see, you won't have to see you know Caucasians or whites at the cafeteria working. I have not seen that at all. I've seen a lot of black women working at the cafeteria. I've seen like people who collect the garbage and cleaning people and all that is, being Hispanic. Um, so all that. So I do see how it just lowers the minority and their status at the university. Midwest University Male 20

This student points out the implication of this pattern of work. Because people of color tend to be concentrated in lower level positions, and whites are not, there is an impact on the status of these groups on campus. In the last chapter, we heard that Latinos feel that whites do not expect much of them. This student's observation ties into that assumption by whites. Institutionally, the work patterns at these universities are reinforcing this assumption.

One student at Southern University actually did research on the patterns of work at her university. What she found matches what Latinos have discussed so far.

Definitely, um, where you see Latinos, and this is based on research that I did last semester, I looked at the racial division between the different levels of employment at Southern University. We dominate the service sector. When it comes to landscape, janitorial work, to work cooking in the kitchens, oh! We're overly represented there. And it's you see a few Latinos as you go up higher and of course the very highest levels, I mean there's none. And um, interestingly enough, there, of course, are more white men than white women, so there's more discrimination than just against race there. But in terms of race, we are overly represented in the bottom sectors, I mean, but we've never had an opportunity, or we've never been in any other position than the ones we're in now. Southern University Female 26

Another student from Southern University also notices this pattern. Not only has he not had any Latino faculty members, but he also cannot recall any Latinos in upper-administrative positions. Generally, the Latinos he has noticed working on his campus are in food service and maintenance.

I mean, everywhere you, every eatery on campus you go to there's someone that looks like me. Every time someone's cutting the grass or working construction, there's someone that's lookin' like me. And just like, people always talk about seeing, having, I guess this gonna sound bad, but just let me finish, or whatever. But like people always talk about seeing people in the high positions and having professors that look like them. But when you have no professors that look like you and then everyone in food services or custodial services looks like you, then yeah, I think there's a problem. Southern University Male 22

Latino students rarely see people in leadership positions or positions of power that look like them. Instead, the people who look like them are in the lowest positions at the university. What kind of message does this send to students of color about the importance of their people at the university?

*Yes, and It's Not That Problematic*

Two students noticed this pattern of overrepresentation of Latinos in lower level positions, but did not interpret it as a problem at the university. Instead, they both saw it as normative. For example, this student talks how starting at the bottom is just normal.

Yeah I've seen that and I kinda see people still portraying us as that. Which is another case that you just have to overcome, certain levels of promotion. "If they do this, if they learn the language, they'll eventually ...." Or you know, just in general...all of Hispanics. We all have to start at the bottom. That's the thing that most people don't value. That you start at the lowest thing, but when you get to the top, you worship everything. It kinda puts you in everything that you want. Midwest University Male 18

Starting at the bottom, working your way up, and to some extent assimilating to the mainstream (for example, learning English) is just how the system works and is to be expected. Another student from this University suggests a different possibility.

Oh yeah, all the maintenance and like food services like in [the dining area,] all the restaurants are like Latinos. Everybody's a Mexican back there. I wouldn't say that the university, like I mean, if they want to work there they want to work there. Female 21, Midwest University

This student makes the claim that if Latinos are willing to take lower level jobs, then that is their choice. While there is a degree of choice when a person accepts a job, the pattern of work that exists at all of these universities suggests that there is something going beyond individual explanations.

Several students on all three campuses noticed the same pattern that has been discussed already without taking a strong stance for or against the situation. Because they did not elaborate on their thoughts about these situations, it is hard to tell if they saw this as a problem. But notably these students pointed out what the other students have said already about the over-representation of Latinos in lower level positions.

That I actually have noticed. You know, I've known a few teachers that are like, you know, that are like higher class and stuff that are Latinos, but a lot that I notice are like janitors or just like the lower positions, I've noticed that they are like. They are like Latinos and stuff. So I've noticed that a lot to tell you the truth. And a lot of places that I go too, or like on my job, you know I've noticed that the janitor, he's Hispanic. Or the guy that changes light bulbs or something. You know, things like that. Yeah, the maintenance guy. I've noticed that. I've noticed that a lot. Southwest University Male 20

This student has noticed the pattern both on and off campus. Latinos again are concentrated in lower level positions from what he has seen. A student from Southern University was surprised to see Latinos in lower positions, because it was quite different from his previous experiences.

Yeah, the cleaning crews and the people that work at Wendy's. Yeah. You know, and, me coming from, from a town where 75 percent Mexican American, I was used to my teacher being Mexican American. My principal, my counselors, the mayor of the town. So it was just a shock to me when I first moved into the dorms and you know the students were all very diverse, but then the ladies cleaning my hallway or the bathrooms, they were all Mexican. And, you know, which is good, I always felt that I could talk them and everything. But, it's not something that really I thought about until I got here and I actually saw it at the food service, or people building the buildings outside. I mean we have these nice facilities, and the people making them are these immigrants actually. So, yeah. Southern University Male 23

This student went from an environment where many of the leadership roles in his town were occupied by Latinos, to a university where most of the Latinos he saw working

were in low positions. He wisely points out as well that the university is maintained and built by Latinos, though they probably go unnoticed as playing an integral role.

What is clear is that on all three campuses, Latinos are concentrated in the lowest paying and lowest prestige occupations. As these students have pointed out, African Americans and Latinos are most often working in food service, janitorial services, grounds, and maintenance. This sends a message to Latino students about how their race is valued on campus. It sends a message to whites that reinforces what they already believe to be true about Latinos. It also demonstrates how institutional racism is at play in higher education, as well as in the greater society. Latinos and African Americans have experienced and continue to experience segregation in many aspects of society (like housing, education, and the work force.) This has an impact on the available options that these groups face in the labor market, which includes higher education.

### **Latino Representation in the Curriculum**

Another way that institutional discrimination plays out at universities has to do with what is presented in the curriculum. Students were asked to talk about whether they felt that Latino culture and history was represented in the curriculum. Only four of the twenty-eight students who responded to this question did not notice this occurrence and most of them explained that they had just not taken courses at the university where Latino contributions would be relevant.

*No Latinos as Important Contributors*

One issue that students talked about was the lack of Latino contributors in their fields. Rarely, if ever, did students hear about Latinos as important contributors, but instead the focus was often only on important whites.

Like I know there are, I can't name anybody, but I know that there's some Latino chemists and biologists out there have done like miraculous things. And you know also, writers and philosophers and—it kinda seems like in all my classes, all the people that we're reading from, all the articles or course packets, there is no Latinos in there. They're all white. Or at least their last names put them as Polish or something. And it's like there's no Latinos. We're not reading anything from any person of ethnic background other than white. And it's kinda like, bummer...People are paying all this money to come here to learn the views of one race and it's really sad. So yeah, I definitely I agree with that. Midwest University Female 21

When there is a lack of diverse voices in the curriculum, students only end up hearing one perspective. For this student, that is problematic, given that she is spending her time and resources on her education at the institution. It is disappointing to her that she only hears about the contributions of whites and none from her own race. A medical student from her University also talks about this as being in issue in her program. Not only is most of the material she reads written by whites, but also the medical trials that she reads about usually have white males as the subjects.

Vivian Thomas is an African American male who invented the surgery for blue babies, which has saved many babies, and you know, we don't learn anything about that. The reason we might [hear] something about is the African American student group will bring in a video about it and during lunch someone will watch it, but we're never told anything about that. I don't even think I can remember of an instance, Latino, black or otherwise, of someone giving us some history about someone other than a white male. And usually, like, today in our lecture, it was pharmacology, and it was some old man you know, invented something that led to all these other drugs being invented and so they'll give you a brief blurb on the history of him and it'll take 20 seconds, but they will. And I've never seen anybody else. Midwest University Female 24 medical student

The onus is on the students to find Latino contributors to their fields. It is not information that they will get in their classes. She also points out that there will be extra information provided about white males and their biography in her classes, while no information about other groups is provided.

*Optional Diversity*

Students also talked about how courses about diversity are available, but they are often optional. The medical student from Midwest University talked about how there are extra sessions on diversity issues in her program, but that they are not required and that generally only those already concerned with diversity will attend. To her it seems like her program paying lip service to concerns about diversity without really doing anything substantial. Other students also talked about how courses about Latinos are offered, but students are not pushed to enroll in them.

You know, you see it in high school. I really wish that they could push for more, because instead of taking like the normal government classes, you can take like History of Mexican Americans in [names state] or something. But the university doesn't do a good job of pushing students. So a lot of times you don't even know that these classes are offered. I think it's very hard to include everyone in one semester of history class, but this is why we have different classes. The problem is that kids don't know they can take this instead of you know European history or American history that they already took in high school. Southern University Male 22

Students are not always aware that they have the option to take something other than American History to meet their curriculum requirements. This student feels the university should do a better job of informing students of their options in this regard.

Some students either come in to college already having taken those courses somewhere else, or they get credit in high school for it. So it just depends but if people come in, and most whites do come in with a couple of credits behind

them. Either because they had AP credit or things like that then they come in and mainly focus on their major. Which if they're an accounting major, they're not gonna see anything close to histories or sociology or anything like that, of other cultures. So, they've talked about putting together an extra course where it kind of introduces you to the university itself, and, and the types of students here. And you know talk about diversity. I think it's helpful, but I think it's just a select few that may need it. So, there's been a lot of complaints about that and I don't think they're gonna implement that just because it is an extra course that people have to take and a lot of these people are [paying] out of their own pockets, so it's not something they wanna do. Um, I think they should maybe have the option, and people that want to take it. But again, the people that should be taking it are gonna be the ones that won't take it. Southern University Male  
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Many students can get through their four years of college education without having to take a course about another group's culture. This student points out that for whites who may come to the university with AP credits or having already completed courses before they arrived, the possibility that they will take a history course about African Americans or Latinos is even slimmer. Though there is discussion of a required diversity course, this student feels it is both unfair to require extra credits and will likely be unsuccessful if it is made optional. We see here that when diversity is optional in the curriculum, then people who could benefit from learning about others might miss out on that information. It suggests that increasing the breadth of coverage in courses like American history would be beneficial.

*"Latinos are Totally Neglected...Totally Neglected."*

Some students talked about the lack of discussion about Latinos in the courses that they are taking. For many, this was not just something that occurred at the university, but has been happening throughout their educational career. Latinos and other people of color are often completely disregarded in the curriculum.



Not at all. This semester I'm taking American Culture class since Civil War, and I mean throughout my whole, not only here but in middle school and high school, usually the teachers and the history give a good representation of African Americans, considering that they're only 11 percent of the population. They definitely give them a little bit more than Asians or Hispanic people or anybody else. Obviously like, at least in my opinion, all the literature is mostly Anglo-American or you know, white American. But I've found it really disturbing in my last class because, I mean considering—and I can understand that in a sense people who write history books and stuff like that would feel obligated to definitely give African Americans their space. Obviously because of the history of slavery and whatnot. And that's completely understandable, but it's like, this is what I heard, maybe it's a little bit exaggerated, but I heard that in the Census 2010, Hispanics are actually gonna, and mostly Mexicans of course, are gonna make up about 60 percent of the U.S. population. And I find it ridiculous that if we're so much, we must be about 50 right now, why aren't we ever mentioned? That's just something that, I think maybe twice in the whole semester my teacher mentioned like Mexican Americans. And he'll talk about the mainstream American culture and then he'll always go back to like African Americans here and there—the Harlem Renaissance and whatnot. Which I think is a good thing of course, but then he never says anything that's going on like. And maybe, you know, in the past there was more Mexicans in Southern U.S. or besides like New York and Chicago, but right now there seems to be everywhere. And you can't really ignore it and I still think that like history doesn't really represent them—us. Southern University Female 21

Though this student grossly overestimates the proportion of Latinos (which is actually about 15 percent of the population, compared to about 12 percent African American according to the 2000 Census), she does note that Latinos are rarely mentioned in her classes. She also feels that though whites are the group talked about most frequently, African Americans get a little more attention in the curriculum than Latinos. She does not seem to be arguing that African Americans should get less, but instead that Latinos should get more attention. Only rarely did her instructor mention Latinos, which has been the case since she was in middle school.

A student at Midwest University discussed how when she took general education courses at a nearby community college, she never heard any mention of Latinos.

Well, with the classes I'm taking, which are Latino Studies, totally. It's all about them, yeah. [What about other classes?] Um, no, since I took my general ed at [names community college,] for sure, the Latinos were neglected. Like especially in high school, totally neglected. In [names community college,] you know it's because, since I'm a transfer student, I came here now it's like my major and the stuff I'm interested in is kind of race and all that stuff. So now I am like totally learning about it, here at Midwest University. But at [names community college] when it's the general curriculum, you have the science, English, no. Not at all. There was no, nothing in Latino, at all. So I didn't know nothing until I came here. [No contributions at all?] No, like in our English class, no, there was no like Latino writers, like, no, there was nothing. Female 21, Midwest University

Prior to becoming a Latino Studies major at Midwest University, this student had no exposure to Latinos in her curriculum. Now that she is taking specialized courses about Latinos, she has learned a great deal. At the community college she attended prior to coming to Midwest University, Latinos were not mentioned in history, English, or any of her courses. This gap in the curriculum at community colleges is also troubling given the fact that Latinos are often concentrated in these types of schools. A study by Fry found that "Latinos are far more likely to be enrolled in two-year colleges than any other group. About 40 percent of Latino 18- to 24-year-old college students attend two year institutions compared to about 25 percent of white and black students in that age group" (Fry 2002, vi). What this means is that it is likely that a great number Latino students will not hear about their culture, history, and Latino contributors if they start in a community college setting. It is also very likely that they will not get this information when they go to four-year institutions, unless they seek out related courses themselves.

### *Specialized Courses*

Often Latinos are only mentioned in specialized courses. Because other departments do not incorporate Latinos into their curriculum, departments and courses

have become available to address that gap. However, if students do not take these specific courses, then it is likely they will not get the information anywhere else.

If it's not in [Latin American studies] class you're not going to see it. Because what they do now, is that all of the [Latin American studies] professors have to, um, they have cross-listed as history courses. So the history department gets off not having to provide other courses outside of the [Latin American studies] department curriculum or courses for the semester, that provide more of an enriching experience for Latino students. [How many?] Yeah, it's only like two or three, that are cross-listed, some are cross-listed as sociology, depending on the topic that their instructor or the professor is taking on. Midwest University Female 24

This student also points out that departments, for example history, are off the hook when it comes to incorporating cultural diversity into their curriculum, because it gets passed off to other departments. I do not believe that students are complaining about the existence of programs like Mexican American studies, but instead they seem to be suggesting that other fields do not have to change or diversify.

A student from Southwest University noticed that Latinos were only discussed in his Spanish course, but not anywhere else. Additionally, a student from Southern University discussed her need to drop the American History course she was enrolled in, because of its representation of Latinos.

Yeah, but that's not just at the university level. That's definitely K-12 and beyond. Luckily because I'm part of [Mexican American studies,] all of my classes are structured around that, so I can't really speak for the common class, even though I know, and I can pretty much say that we're not represented. [Like if you took US History here?] [chuckles] I had to drop that class. I had to drop that class, because it wasn't just about the Latino history that was misrepresented, the indigenous history was misrepresented. And that I think, that was just the beginning of the end for me. [So if you're not taking classes in Mexican American studies, you don't get that information?] No, not unless you take a class in that, but, you know, but no. It's very Euro-centric curriculum, very Euro-centric. Southern University Female 26

This student talks about how the curriculum outside of Mexican American studies is Euro-centric. If students do not go beyond the core curriculum, they will end up with a very limited version of history and culture.

*Limited Inclusion*

Many students mentioned that Latinos are sometimes included in their courses, but only in very limited ways. It might be a mention here or there, or only a specific aspect of their culture. For example, one student from Midwest University told me that contemporary Latinos are not discussed in his class, but instead the focus is on Aztecs, which he feels is problematic. A student from Southwest University mentioned that Latinos occasionally, but rarely come up in her sociology courses. Sometimes only regional information is provided as pointed out by another student from Southwest University. This student from Southern University points out the limited inclusion of Latinos in his courses.

I think they probably mentioned it when California and Texas got annexed to the U.S. but that's probably as far as it goes. I mean the Chicano Movement, which I know I don't know anything about, was not taught in history classes. The only reason why I know a little bit about it is because of one of my literature classes. I chose to read a little bit on that. [You had to seek it out?] Yes. I don't know anything about the Chicano movement. Male 22, Southern University

In terms of his history course, this student points out that only one aspect of Latino history was included. The Chicano movement was not mentioned or included, so he had to seek out information about it in an English class.

For the most part we have seen that an Anglo, Euro-centric curriculum is still dominating the institutions of higher education. Though Latinos are sometimes

included, most often that occurs in courses that specialize in Latino culture or history.

Unless students seek out information about Latinos, it is difficult to find.

### **Latino Student Leadership**

Students were asked to comment on whether or not they felt Latinos were represented in student organizations and leadership positions on campus. About half of the students noticed that there was a lack of student leadership among Latinos. Others either did not notice this issue or did not think that it was a problem.

#### *Lack of Latino Leadership*

A student from Midwest University talks about how there is a general lack of Latino leadership on her campus. She also notes a lack of African Americans represented as well.

There's not representation for Latinos or Latinas. Or I would say even African Americans at that level of the student leadership level. The graduate student government is completely, primarily Asian Americans and whites and some Middle-Eastern. And I think I see two out of the 17 people in the [inaudible] student government that are Latino or Latina. And again, it becomes problematic because whose interests are going to be met? And who is going to benefit off of those resources that are available? And how accessible are these resources to other student organizations? Midwest University Female 24

Students in leadership positions are able to be involved in how campus resources are distributed and can get their message more easily heard by the university. When Latinos and African Americans are not a part of that, those groups could be missing out.

#### *Organizations as a White Space*

There was some debate when I spoke with students about why it was that Latinos did not hold many leadership positions on their campus. Was it because Latino students were not interested in participating or was it because student organizations were already

seen as a white space and therefore it would be difficult for Latinos to become a part of them?

I have, but it's not that the organizations are to be at fault. I think it's for the Latino students who don't want to be a part of them. They're all there and they're all open, because I was part of the Midwest University undergrad student government minority committee. But it's like nobody else wants to get involved and it's pretty much they're all white. You kind of feel out of place and that's why I dropped my position then. [Do you think it's already a white space or that Latinos aren't interested?] It could be those two. I would say it is the Latinos that don't want to get involved, because it's a white thing to do. Because that's how I felt and that's why I dropped my position. Because I didn't feel like I could talk to anybody. They all were kinda snotty and rude and I was like "I don't fit in" so that's kind of why I dropped out and I didn't want to be part of it. Midwest University Male 21

This student made a connection between both sides of the debate. He suggests that because student organizations are a mostly white space, Latinos are not interested in being involved in them. For him, he dropped a leadership position because he felt that he did not fit in and that whites were treating him badly. One student from Southwest University talked about his impressions of the Homecoming Queen election on his campus.

I'll bring up an example of Homecoming last year. Like I mean, I saw a lot of Hispanic names for like Homecoming queen. And I was kinda like "Yeah whatever"...I didn't really pay it much attention. . .and then I was like reading the [names school newspaper] and I saw the girl who did win Homecoming queen and it was like this, the typical blonde haired blue-eyed girl and I was like "Whoa! That's kinda, that's kinda interesting." I didn't even think of something like that. I mean, that kind of caught my attention. Southwest University Male 22

It was surprising to this student when a white woman won Homecoming Queen, which made him wonder why that was. Again, the question becomes whether or not Latinos are not interested or if they feel isolated from those events. This student felt that

if Latinos were afraid to join organizations because they felt it was a white space, that they were creating barriers for themselves. As we have seen though, whites can be less than welcoming when Latinos do enter those groups.

Southern University students talked about the recent election of a Latino as their student body president. Many of the students saw this as a positive step for Latinos at the university, since this was the first Latino they were aware of holding that position. These students saw his leadership as evidence that if a student works at it, and if they are willing to go through tough times, they can succeed.

Last year, the student government president was Hispanic [says name]. I think what it is, is that you have to take that step out there and you have to want to really do. I know it's gonna be harder, but it's been done. To be student government president of the Southern University, which has like 1000s of students, I think that's an accomplishment. I'm not sure if he was the first Hispanic, but I wanna go check on that. But I think it's possible, it's as much as you want to get involved in. [Do you think there is a lack of interest or students perceive this as a white space?] Space. Yeah, it's a hard. I think you have to really, really want it in order to obtain it. I think, you're gonna go through a lot, because in a way, it sucks to say it, but it's a popularity, and so if you're not the majority it's gonna be harder. . . And I think that, I mean if you see something, and you're like "Oh, well I don't want to try that because it's not gonna happen." But I mean, the only way to overcome that is just by getting people in those positions. And so, until that happens, it's just gonna be like that. Southern University Female 19

This student acknowledges that obtaining a role like that at her university will require a great deal of work and struggle. She points out that it is a harder to accomplish because of the popularity aspect involved. But she is confident that as Latinos fill more of those positions, they will become easier to obtain in the future.

Another student did not see the position in the same way. To her, the student who won did not represent her as a Latina and she felt it was easier for him to win,

because of his socioeconomic status and his platform. She felt that this student leader had conformed to white folkways, which was why he was an appealing candidate to whites.

For example, the student government president last year was Latino, however, he came from South Texas and his family was very affluent in South Texas and very involved in politics down there, so his perspective was based on an upper-class view, and that tends to coincide with the middle-upper class white view and it tends to go against the middle-lower class Latino view on this campus. So, he wasn't really representative of Latinos. What he was, was a brown face in a corporate suit voting along with the majority white representatives in student government. [Does that factor into why he got elected?] I think it would factor into why a white student would have elected him, because he wouldn't be threatening. He wouldn't be going in to change up any existing power structure. He would be reinforcing it and of course by having a brown face reinforcing that, you know, it would make it seem that there was parity on campus. That things are just so nice and everybody's getting along. And it wasn't like that. So, and I think initially people didn't know his politics. So if brown people did vote for him, they didn't know what was coming. Southern University Female 26

From this student's perspective, the Latino who won the election was not representative of all Latinos and, if anything, he was likely to have more in common with upper-class whites than lower or middle class Latinos. For her, this was not a step forward for Latinos, because he was not going to make changes in the power structure that she found necessary. She points out that it is likely that whites voted for him because of this reason. Clearly, there is some controversy on this issue. One student articulates the dilemma that Latinos in leadership positions face.

The problem with Latino students and any really, with any student that wants to be deeply involved in their campus community and in their racial/ethnic campus community, is that they have to play a dual role. And people don't understand the dual role that we have to play. Not only do we understand we have to be in those avenues and those spaces of student government and you know those top historic organizations here at the university. But at the same time, like we have to have a presence in our community, so it's like a dual role that we're always playing and always having to be in two spaces at once. And a lot of times, it



ends up really becoming a choice of which one you're gonna do. And you know, if you don't do the student government route, you're not considered a campus leader. You're not considered, you know, on par with everyone else. And if you do the student government route, then you're ignoring your community, and your own community is asking where you went. So it's a lose-lose situation and it's very hard to do both. It's very hard. Southern University Male 22

The dual role that Latino leaders face creates difficulties in how to balance these two sides of themselves. There is a need to serve both their community and their school, which can be a challenge, with both sides wanting more. The result is that Latino leaders have to make sacrifices in order to do both.

Many students did not notice a lack of Latino representation in student organization and leadership positions on their campuses. Some felt that the representation was great and that there was not a problem in this regard. However, most of the students did not notice, because they too were not very involved. What I think this points to is the non-traditional college experience that many Latino students have. Some of them commute, some of them are parents, and some of them are taking care of their parents or siblings. Many of them have jobs outside of school. Many of these students come to campus to take their classes and then they leave, so getting involved in the campus life is not something they have time to do.

### **Feeling Unwelcome or Unsafe on Campus**

Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) found that African Americans they spoke with encountered racialized space on their campuses. "The concept of racialized space encompasses the cultural biases that help define specific areas and territories as white or as black, with the consequent feelings of belonging and control" (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996, 50). There were places on campus that African Americans felt they could

not enter. Latino students in this study were asked if there were any places on campus where they felt unwelcome or unsafe because of their race. Over half of the students reported that they did feel safe on their campus and that race was not an issue in terms of their feeling of security. Eleven of the students did have some concerns about feeling comfortable on campus and indicated places where they would not want to go.

### *Feeling Out of Place*

A few students talked about places on campus where they felt that, because of their race, they did not fit in. Even in places that are designed for all students to use felt unwelcoming as this student points out.

Yeah, the student center. I hate going there because I feel so self conscious, like everybody's looking at me. Because I know that that place, it's like big on group things and a lot of groups go there to associate and do their meetings and stuff. So I know that whenever I walk in there I'm gonna see some sorority or some math team or something, science club, something. And I kind of feel like most of the people coming out of there or going in there for that reason are white. And so I kind of feel like when I'm walking in there, even if I am going there for something, like I have no reason to be there. That's how I feel. Midwest University Female 21

Even when this student has a reason to go into this building, she got the feeling that she did not belong there. She saw it as a white space and therefore she felt self-conscious and out of place when she had to go in that building. A student from Southern University talks about the discomfort she felt when going with one of her friends to a party.

So I've been to like a couple fraternity or sorority parties, which are majority white people. And I never really felt, I mean I definitely felt a little uncomfortable being there, just because I felt like I definitely stuck out like a sore thumb. But I never felt like it was necessarily dangerous ...I guess, usually like uncomfortable feeling that anybody would get being like the only person of that race surrounded by a lot—but I didn't consider it a threat or anything like

that. [Are there other places where you've had that feeling?] Do you mean like, on-campus, like at school right? Like in the perimeters of [yeah.] I mean like a lot of class are, are majority white people, but I don't...I guess it's different from like a party scene, because you're at school. And I don't feel threatened by that all. But like when you're at a party and people are drinking, that's when I think people can be more, I don't know, I guess, communitive about that way they feel. Southern University Female 21

For this student, fraternity or sororities parties were environments where she did feel uncomfortable because of her race. Though she did not feel that her safety was at risk, there was still a general feeling of discomfort. Unlike when she is the only Latina in her classes, at a party she felt that people were more like to say things or do things that would be inappropriate. Other students also talked about discomfort that they felt near fraternities and sororities, which will be discussed later on.

### *Closed Doors*

One student talked about how he felt that some doors are not as open to him because of his race. He did not feel unsafe on campus, but just that some people were more willing to help him than others.

I don't want to say that, but I definitely do see how certain doors are a little bit more open more wider than others. I don't feel like I am limited to the resources, or that I am stopped because of my race of what the university's, such as the library, counseling or anything of the sort. But I do [feel] that they're like "Well if you need some counseling, here's the [names organization that advises Latinos] group or here's the Hispanic, you know thing." So I could talk to a white person, as long as they help me out. That's all I need, but I do feel like, I do have the resources available, but once maybe I start having a little bit more difficulty, then [they] tend to push me aside, you know, to the basic, "just stick with your kind" I guess. Midwest University Male 20

This student is not afraid to ask for help from whites and does not feel blocked from using university resources. But he does get the sense that at times whites are not willing to work with him. Instead he feels that because there is an organization that is meant to

assist Latinos, that whites are likely to push him towards that group when he needs help. Rather than directly assisting him, he gets the feeling that he's being passed off to another office, and that the door has been closed in terms of providing assistance.

### *White Space*

Some areas of campus are seen as belonging more to whites than others. We have heard one student talk about the student center on her campus as being white space. A few other students have also noticed this phenomenon.

Well, I think like Hispanic people tend to, not cluster together, but you know where they're gonna be at. For example, I'm in a multicultural sorority, so whenever we flyer, we always flyer in [names residence hall], because there's always minority students here. I don't know why. Maybe it's because, this dormitory that we're in, I don't know why but all the—Now that I think about it all the Hispanic organizations flyer in [names residence hall.] Very few of them are gonna flyer in the, what they call the, the [mall area.] You never flyer there. . [The mall] is just like an area of like buildings, but the people that, very few people flyer there like as far as Hispanic organizations, unless you have like an event going on there. . I just know that, like all the Anglo student fraternities, if they were to flyer or have a table it would be in the [mall area.] Southern University Female 19

This student talks about two areas of campus that organizations use to advertise events. One is a residence hall that a few of the respondents referred to as the “minority dorm.” Latinos are more likely to advertise their events in this hall, because they know they are going to be reaching more people of color. The mall area of campus tends to be more of a white space in terms of flyering. Latinos generally would not utilize this area unless their event was occurring there. There also seems to be some segregation in terms of where students live.

For one student from Midwest University, the place on campus where she feels most uncomfortable is the major department.

I don't like being in the psychology department. I don't. I really don't. I don't feel comfortable there. I don't feel—[Does it feel like a white space?] Oh yeah, totally white dominated. And it's just like disgusting to me. And it's my major and that's the reason I had to pick up another major, because I was like "I will not pursue psychology any further" and if they ask me I'll say that's why. "Because I feel like it's a white supremacist department. And I hate it. And I feel like you guys are not helpful." And so, that's where I feel most uncomfortable, actually in the department where I have my major. Midwest University Female 24

This student mentioned during the discussion about faculty represent that she felt she needed to pick up another major, because of a lack of diversity there. She disclosed that she did not feel like she could get support in that department and that people were not concerned about her success as a student. Here again she talks about her discomfort in her department. It is a white dominated area to the degree that she hates to go there. Her discomfort was severe enough for her to pursue another area of study.

#### *Fraternities and Sororities*

Several students from Southern University talked about how they were most uncomfortable around fraternities and sororities. If there was one place that they would not want to go, it is near these groups.

I feel most uncomfortable around like the fraternity/sorority houses. Just in that general area. But I still get the same, "Why are you here?" feeling from all 40 acres, you know? The safest place for me is [Mexican American studies department.] Anywhere outside of that, God only knows what could happen. [What leads to that feeling?] You get the, the look. And I use that in quotes. "The look" is the look that you get, let's say even when you're out in regular society, you go to the store; that look that people give you when you're suspect. What are your motives, what are you doing here, are you going to steal something? That look carries over from stores, department stores, outside of the campus, to the campus. So the look here is applied to "What are you doing in this college? Oh affirmative action." You know, that sort of thing. And I don't really get it from too many blacks. I don't get it from the Asians. I don't get it from Indians. It's mainly the whites. And I think even there, it's not all whites.

It's the upper-classes of whites that are here at the university. Southern University Female 26

This student mentions sororities and fraternities as being an uncomfortable space for her, but also feels discomfort everywhere outside of the Mexican American studies department. She has a feeling that she is not wanted throughout the campus and gets that sense because of a look that she gets from whites.

Another student completely avoids area where fraternities and sororities are located because of a prior incident that angered him when he was there with some friends.

On west campus, which is like where a lot of students live. . . I never wanna go there. [Fraternities?] Yeah, there's a lot of fraternities. It's just the way that actually people act over there is ridiculous. I hate going there. I hate going there. And the only reason I really have to go over there is for parties, and I don't even go to them anymore. I just stay away. [What's the behavior that keeps you away?] Behavior is like really drunk, disrespectful people. The way they act. Like I remember, we rolled up on somebody in my roommate's truck. And you know his truck is like a little pick-up and there was like three of us stuffed in there, just waiting. And I don't know, I forgot what this student did, but I know he did something [that] really, really triggered me. I forgot what he did exactly, but when he saw us in that truck, he did something that just, I definitely don't ever go there. I don't wanna go there. Southern University Male 22

Though the student could not recall precisely what happened, the incident angered him to the point that he does not want to go to that part of campus again. He points out how alcohol makes the situation on that side of campus more risky.

Even when students want to go to parties on that part of campus, some feel that they should not.

I know like as a freshman living here on campus a lot of the big organizations or fraternities throw these great parties in west campus. And I mean just knowing that I was, not part of that; I couldn't go. And I've heard stories that if a white

fraternity was throwing a party, they only pass out flyers to certain people and things like that. So, it's not something where I felt free to go. So, there were some areas that I try not to go to, like maybe some of these parties and some of these events. . . But um, other than that I never thought there was you know big issues in that way, but again, since I've been here, there've been events they've, people have thrown eggs at the MLK statue or you know, done graffiti on it or things like that so. I never see it out in the open, but I know it goes on. So I don't know what to avoid and what not to avoid. Southern University Male 23

Whites have ways of maintaining the boundaries to white space, as we can see in this student's account. Fraternities choose who to pass flyers out to when they advertise for their parties, making this student feel like he was not welcome to go to those parties.

Another way whites maintain their space is by vandalism. This student and a few others talked about how the Martin Luther King Jr. statue was egged or vandalized in other ways, which could mean that whites interpret these representations as violations of their territory.

The issue of racialized space was more pronounced on some campuses than others. The respondents from Southwest University did not report having this issue to the same degree as the other campuses. From my limited time on campus, there were more spaces that were dedicated to Latinos and the environment was more inviting in terms of symbolic representation on campus. I do feel it would be hasty to determine that there are not racialized spaces on this campus, but instead it would be important to talk with more students further examine this issue.

## **Conclusion**

Institutional discrimination exists on these campuses in many different ways. Latinos are underrepresented in the curriculum, on the faculty, and in student leadership positions. There is evidence of racialized space on campus, where students feel

uncomfortable or unsafe, as well as continuing segregation at one university in particular in regards to student housing. Latinos are underrepresented on the faculty, while being overrepresented in lower level positions, like service work and maintenance. Students are also not represented on their campus in symbolic ways including artwork, statutes, and university publications. Additionally, these contextual types of racism have an impact on students of color. Some felt that they did not belong at the university and had a feeling of being unworthy. They felt that whites did not expect much from them, and found that often programs meant to help them actually reinforced this belief. They also felt that the overrepresentation of Latinos in lower level positions minimized the importance of Latinos at their school. Some were frustrated and discouraged by campus bureaucracies that seemed to be obstacles to their educational attainment. Many students had life experiences that did not match the cultural capital that was expected at the university, which resulted in them feeling mired in red tape or disconnected from the campus.

Institutional racism also affected how Latinos interacted in class and at times added discomfort and stress. When Latino students lack faculty role models, they feel unsupported at the university; as if there is no one that understands them and their experiences. This can also impact the enthusiasm that students have in their classes. At least one student talked about how much she enjoyed the course she had taught by a Latino graduate student and that it was the only class she felt comfortable participating in. Students also struggled to find outlets for learning about their culture and history. This information had to be sought out and was rarely widely available in general



education classes, which meant it was hard for Latinos to find and also likely something white students were rarely exposed to.

All of these factors help maintain the white power structure that exists in these institutions. Latinos earn their places at universities and pay money to attend them, but because of institutionalized racism, often they do not get the same experiences as their white counterparts. Rather than being a positive experience, many students feel pain, exclusion, hostility, and frustration while in college. They feel underappreciated and blocked from opportunities. These experiences are similar to what Feagin, Imani, and Vera (1996) found when talking with African American students. Though universities have opened their doors to students of color, the institutions have not adjusted to the diversity, but instead remain white dominated places.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION OFF-CAMPUS**

Racism and discrimination were not limited to university campuses. In fact, almost every student I spoke with could point to at least one thing that occurred off campus, either to themselves or to their family and friends. Off-campus racism came in many forms ranging from mistreatment from the police to more subtle actions by whites.

#### **Mistreatment by the Police**

Racial profiling continues to be an issue in today's society, with people of color being more likely to be pulled over or harassed by the police. Many of the students talked about issues that they have had with the police. Some experienced being pulled over or questioned for no reason, others were accused of drug possession, and a few even talked about issues they had with their campus police. Only seven students of the twenty-six respondents did not report this or did not know of any close friends or family members that had.

#### *“Driving While Brown”*

Several of the students had been pulled over by the police for no reason. One student dubbed this phenomenon “driving while brown,” which is an issue that has come up for African Americans as well (“driving while black.”) Because of police discretion and the broad definition of probable cause, officers do not have to have a solid or legitimate reason for pulling someone over, as many of these students have found out.

Yes—lots of times! I guess twice that I can think of. I've been pulled over twice for not having the light on my back license plate. [It] hasn't been on. There's a license plate number and there's no light to light up the license plate. Those have not been on or working, but when I check them, they're working. So that's the excuse I'm given for being pulled over. And every time, or both times that's happened, it's been—I've been—you know, it's not just being pulled over. You'll pulled out of the car and you have to do tests to see if you're not drunk or something like that. [Wouldn't happen if you were white?] Yeah, I think so. No, probably not. [I'm trying to think if my car has a license plate light.] I know because I check now every time whether is on or off—whether it's working or not. Southwest University Male 21

When I spoke with this student, I was not even sure if my car had a back license plate light, and as a white person, it is not something I have ever had to be concerned about. (It does not by the way.) However, for this student, he is very aware of the status of this part of his automobile. He mentions that though he checks it regularly, he has been pulled over on two occasions because an officer claimed that this light was not functioning. He also points out that it is not a simple matter of just getting pulled to the side of the road. Instead, it is a big ordeal. He has been taken out of his car and has been questioned about whether or not he has been drinking. Another student talks about experiences she has had with the police as well, and also notes the attitude that she has encountered in those situations.

Not me as a driver, but me as a passenger, yes. Many times. I think it goes beyond just being pulled over, but how the police officer interacts with you. Like I could understand, okay you have somebody that, we match the description or whatever, but it's your interaction with us too. I mean you're already assuming that we're guilty without even questioning us. Yeah, I've run a lot into that. . .[Was it a Hispanic person driving when it happened?] Yes, yeah. [What was the interaction?] I mean it's very aggressive right off the bat. Very accusatory. And I mean we ask like, "What did we do wrong to get pulled over?" And it's never something that you did wrong to get pulled over, it's like you know, something attracted their attention to you. I think I even I got pulled over once for driving, and I still will never forget it. . .But it was because, I mean he, I asked him "Why did, I mean, why did you pull me over?" He's like,

“Because you looked at me suspiciously in the rear-view mirror.” And I’m like, “Wow,” I mean I looked in the rear-view mirror and I looked back. I mean how, how does somebody look at you? So, yeah, very interesting situations that I think, unless you’ve been there, you don’t understand them. Southern University Female 30

Again we see the trend of Latinos being given no reason for why they are being pulled over. For this student, the officer accused her of looking suspiciously in the rear-view mirror, which seems like an overreaction. She rightly wonders how she was supposed to be looking in the rear-view. Also evident is the accusatory approach that officers engage when they are interacting with Latinos they pull over. She notes that it is aggressive from the beginning, even though there seems to be no serious violation. She mentions later that as she has gotten older, this has happened a lot less, but she has had similar encounters at least 10 times!

A student from Southwest University shares two encounters that he had with the police. Though he wonders if the circumstances played into his getting pulled over (for example, it was late at night), there still seems to be a racial element at work

[chuckles] I have one incidence in Las Cruces. I mean, given the—I’ve looked at the circumstances and I’m kinda like “Okay maybe.” Well, um, I was in Las Cruces and it was late at night, which the whole thing coulda been because it was late at night and I’m driving home alone. . .I see this one cop kinda pull behind me. And he starts following me. So I’m just like “Okay whatever.” I’m kinda of laughing it off. And—I see another cop turn off and start coming too. And I’m like “Okay, this is kinda funny.” So they pull up beside me and I could just see these cops like looking at me. I look and they’re like looking at me and kinda talking in between each other. So, I look again and they’re still looking at me—and like this is funny—so I wave at them. And I probably shouldn’t have done that because the next thing I know I’m getting pulled over. And so, they start questioning me like where I was, you know, how much I had [drank] that night. I was like, “I haven’t. I was at a friend’s house playing poker.” So they run my license and registration, whatever, they come back and they’re like “Get out of here,” so I’m like “Why’d you pull me over?” Like at the time my car had just a lap belt and a hanging part up here, that was broken. And he was just like,

“Well, I pulled you over because, we didn’t see a seatbelt and it’s kind of broken and you need to go get that fixed or else you can get a ticket.” And I’m thinking “Well, I don’t think so. I think the law is that you have to have a seat belt, you know a safety harness. I don’t think it specifically states that you have to have, you know—the shoulder thing.” And he got pissed, “Get outta here!” Southwest University Male 22

I asked this student if he felt he was pulled over because of his race. He was reluctant to name that as the reason for the incident, but instead figured it was because of the time of day and the location he was in. The same student shared another incident that happened to him, only this time with border patrol.

And most of the time I’ve gotten waived through, but this one time I was with a couple of friends. And they bring the dogs by my car. The dog doesn’t do anything. It walks away, so this one cop grabs the dog, a different cop walks out, grabs the dog and brings it back to my car. And he’s like “So, Where are your guys drugs at?” And—we don’t have anything and I’m kind of like weirded out, I’m like “What?” He starts, like kinda like trying, trying you know, to force kind of a confession or something. He’s like, “You know what—the dog’s right here. Um—the dog’s right here. And we’re gonna drain hours out of your day for us to get a warrant.” He’s all “Let me search the car.” I’m like “You need a warrant.” So he’s like “Well, we’ll drain hours out of your day and” blah, blah, blah. “So you can make this a lot easier for yourself if you let us just search the car and you know.” I was like “No. You need a warrant...I have nothing to do. We can wait all day.” And he got pissed and he was like “Get out of here.” You know, finally let us through. Southwest University Male 22

The assumptions made by the officers at this border patrol stop are staggering, as well as their tactics in dealing with this student. Though the drug dog seemed to be uninterested in their car, because they had no drugs, the officer makes it seem as if there was a hit by the dog. The officers also seem to be forcing a confession from this student, as well as pressuring him to let them search his car. The manipulation these officers were using was extreme. However, this student stood up to them and because of that, they were eventually allowed to go. Though the student is again not sure if this

encounter was race related, his experience was very similar to other Latinos who have had negative experiences with the police.

A few students mentioned that they feel this is a gendered phenomenon as well. Though some women had encountered this, some also speculated that men deal with this issue a lot more often than they do. A Midwest University student talks about an incident that occurred with her father.

I think females get it a lot less. My brother gets pulled over a lot more often. Males, I think, it must be really hard to be—"driving while brown" is what we call it in California. . .My father, we live in a pretty affluent neighborhood in California, and my father loves to garden and he's walked around our neighborhood and been harassed by police, because he was looking at someone's garden and someone called the cops. [In your own neighborhood?] In our neighborhood, like we lived a block away. And my little brother's had similar problems. So I think that men get it a lot more than women, because I have never experienced it personally. [Your brother and dad have?] Oh definitely. [For no reason at all?] I can't promise that my little brother's done nothing, because he's a little crazy. But I know for a fact that my dad walking around in the middle of the day, you know looking at gardens, you know it's not like he was going up to people's front doors or anything. You know, he might have stopped to admire. And he's judge, um—I know he wasn't doing anything. And it's happened more than once. Midwest University Female 24 medical student

This student's father holds a prominent position in their community as a judge. Regardless of their socioeconomic status, her father has been questioned by the police on more than one occasion while walking around his neighborhood looking at gardens in the middle of the day. Despite the fact that this man lived nearby, he was still seen as a threat or as suspicious by his neighbors, and apparently by the police who questioned him. Another student talks about the way gender can influence treatment by the police.

I got pulled over once for no reason. I don't know, the cop said I was speeding, but I was making sure that I wasn't speeding. I know my brother-in-law; he got pulled over for no reason. He wasn't doing anything. My sister got pulled over for no reason. I have a lot of people that get pulled over for no reason. I mean

I've been in a car where it's like "Hello, we didn't do anything!" [Do they give you a reason?] Yeah, they'll say "You were speeding" and I'll be like "No." They're like "Okay, well your seatbelt's not on. So here's a ticket." So they always say like—from the cops I've seen a lot of racism, discrimination really. . .[How often does this happen?] I've only been pulled over once, but I'm pretty sure, I think it has a lot to do with that I'm female. And not that just I'm female, but I actually have kids. I have two little girls. So maybe if the cops see that I have the girls, like they wouldn't, they're not gonna pull me over. But like guys that are, and especially if they're in a group, that's it. They'll get pulled over right away. Female 21, Midwest University.

This student feels that she may be shielded from mistreatment by the police because of her gender and because she has kids. Officers are less likely to see her as threatening because of those two factors. For men though, she believes it's a different story and that especially if men are together in groups, they are at risk for being pulled over. She, like the other respondents, points out that when she has encountered this situation, no real reason is given by the police for pulling them over.

#### *Other Types of Mistreatment by Police*

A few students shared other types of mistreatment they had encountered from the police. For example, a student at Southern University talks about some issues with the local police that are concerning to her.

Racial profiling is something very much alive here in [this city] and you know some Latino cops have become very insensitive to their own people. And I think that there is a larger issue at hand. And that is the criminalization of Latinos and blacks has become increasingly prevalent here. . .So definitely I see that happening. Mmm hmmm. . .got those blue lights. You know the blue light specials that they call it. But they have blue lights everywhere. Maybe they feel they're unsafe, but we're also fighting gentrification. And the middle-class yuppies are coming and moving in, and they're the ones calling the cops. Sometimes for no reason at all. We could be having a cultural event and we'll be playing cultural music. And at 10:30 at night you'll see the cops coming to break us up. But then you'll hear this loud ass rock or metal music at 1 o'clock in the morning and, nothing. You know? You can call but they won't show up for a while. Midwest University Female 24

Police brutality is a big issue in the city where this student is going to school. Additionally she talks about how Latinos and black are being criminalized in society. An example of that to her is the presence of safety lights. I believe she is referring to the area around the university. To her, these lights send a message that the area is dangerous, because of the population that lives near the university. Gentrification has resulted in whites moving into that area and perceiving more danger than probably exists, which means unnecessary police response to non-criminal incidents. She points out a double standard, where whites are allowed to be loud when Latinos are not.

A student from Southwest University shares an incident that occurred with the campus police. I believe his experience exemplifies many of the points that the previous student was touching on.

Actually there was once. We were training here at Southwest University. It was Southwest University PD, and every single day they see us run out there with rubber rifles that have painted barrels that are white. And at the time, they decided that they gonna make a point. And I was running and they told me to pull over. Wait, not pull over but just stop running. And they pointed their guns at me and I heard "Click." And I was like "It's a rubber rifle." "Get on the ground!" And so they put me down to the ground. Four-pointed me, that means I was like "that" on the ground. They took the rifle, thinking it was real, even though they have seen us. Two months running every single day. And, they questioned me about it and everything. And I said "It's a rubber rifle. We train every day. I know, because I've seen you before looking at me run." My friend came back, and he was behind me and he was white. . .And, they told him, "Hey, just wanted to make sure that what he's saying is true, you know. I see that your weapon, I know it's rubber." And they didn't take it from him. They didn't arrest [him.] They didn't handcuff him, they didn't put him in a car. They didn't ask him to get up after he had been handcuffed on the ground on his face. And even to the point where I, we, in conference together, I was still handcuffed, he wasn't. . .But the bad thing about it was she's the one that went "click." And I'm like "Oh no, she just took the safety off." She took the safety off and cocked her hammer. So I'm glad that I didn't get shot that day. Southwest University Male



Despite the fact that these officers had seen ROTC members running on the campus for at least two months, they felt compelled to not only stop this student, but to handcuff him, put him to the ground, and point their weapons at him. It was not until a white person approached the officers and vouched for this student, that they were willing to let him go. Importantly, the student points out that though the white student was also carrying a rubber rifle, the officers did not respond with the same aggressiveness. He was happy to not have been shot after hearing one officer take the safety off her gun. What would have happened if his white friend had not been there?

A student from Southern University also recalls a negative experience with the university police department.

It was a Southern University PD officer, he was on the windowsill of the other officer's truck. So there were two officers, and me and my roommate walked, you know, not too close, but it was kinda close. And while we walked, like he turned around very, just strange, like "Why did he turn around like that?" [Like he was worried you'd do something?] Yeah. Southern University Male 22

Again we see students being treated like suspects on their own campus. Though these officers did not approach the students, the reaction was still odd. There was an assumption about the criminality of these students, which is why they received a strange look from the officers. The officers seem to perceive that the students did not belong there based only on their race.

#### *Friends or Family Facing This Issue*

Some students had not encountered mistreatment directly, but had stories to share about their family and friends.

I know [my friend] has been pulled over tons of times. I forgot what suburb it was, but they do pull you over and they were just expecting. They were pulling her over for right reasons, I think the driver was driving without insurance and all this other stuff and she didn't wanna, she was just a passenger, so they got pulled over. They arrested the guy. But they were actually just waiting for her to get in the car and drive off, so they would pull her over as well. Because of the uninsured car. Thankfully she kind of noticed it and she knows the background of that suburb and the police of those suburbs and she was like, "Just take me, arrest me, because I'm going with you guys, because I'm not going in that car if you guys are going to arrest me." So they were definitely "We arrested one of them. Let's get the other one!" type of thing. [Do you know how often that happens?] Fortunately I do want to say that it doesn't happen to me too much, but it does happen to her a lot. And then she does have darker skin. She is hanging out with her boyfriend is obviously, you know, that Mexican little boy or whatever. I could definitely just see maybe the shitty car and all this other stuff that they just serialize. "Well if you're driving a bad car, if you're Hispanic, you must but up to something wrong." Midwest University Male 20

Wisely, the student's friend realized that she was being set up by the police and she managed to avoid getting arrested along with her boyfriend. He speculates that he gets pulled over less often than his friend, because she has darker skin than he does. So to police, he is less identifiable as a Latino and seen as less threatening. He accurately sums up what many students are reporting about what police assume about Latinos. Driving a bad car and being an identifiable as a Latino indicates to police that there must be some sort of wrong-doing on their part. A student from Southwest University also comments on the impact of skin color.

I've never been pulled over because of race, but I have heard of my friends who got pulled over, just because they're darker and the police think that they did something wrong because of that. [Did they talk about why they got pulled over or the police response?] Well, they think it's because they're, you know, because the police didn't give them any reason and my guess is because they're not white. Southwest University Female 19

Though she does not provide a specific example, we see the same pattern. If you are a dark-skinned Latino, your chances of getting pulled over seem to increase. A student from Southern University shares what she heard from a classmate about this issue.

I studied abroad in Italy about 2005, last summer. And of one of the people in the group was, he was an older man, he was about 27 or 28. . . And he worked in [a suburb], which is about 30 minutes north of here. He would tell me all the time like, like the police officers that would literally stop people because of how they looked. He just told me like straight up, you know that's it. Like they'd stop you because of how you looked, because of your skin color, and it happens all the time over there. Or if they saw like a Mexican license plate, they'd stop you. I don't know if I've ever had them stop. It's, usually when I get stopped it's because I'm doing something I wasn't supposed to do like speeding. There's still like this fear of police officers. Southern University Male 22

Here we see more evidence of racial profiling. This student was told by his classmate that police in that area would pull over Latinos just because of how they looked, without needing a legitimate reason, which is a trend that has been evident throughout this analysis. He points out that though this has not happened to him, there is still a level of fear that he has of the police. Rather than police officers being someone that Latinos can go to for assistance or help, they are seen as threatening to many of these students.

A few students have not had this experience. One felt that if you're going to get pulled over, it will just happen regardless of your color.

I don't think there's cops out there, just sitting there looking at what kind of race you are. You're going to get pulled over no matter what, so. It hasn't happened to me yet so. [knocks on wood] Midwest University Male 21

Though he claims that he feels race is not an issue, there is also a degree of doubt about that, hence the gesture of knocking on wood. Another student from that university did not have an incident to report and "knock on wood" it hasn't so far. There is some

assumption that it could occur through his use of this gesture. One student felt that the type of car driven is more of a variable than race in predicting whether or not someone will get pulled over. And another speculated that the ethnic make-up of the area can have an impact. Her town was mostly Latino, so racial profiling was not an issue there.

For many students however, racial profiling and mistreatment by the police is a reality for them. They have to take extra precautions so as not to be targeted by the police, but even that does not always help. Men seem to be more at risk than women, but women were not exempt from experiencing mistreatment. Age and socioeconomic status also did not exempt Latinos from being seen as suspicious.

### **Extremely Bad Service in a Restaurant or Store**

Students were asked to talk about whether they had received extremely bad or rude treatment in restaurants or stores off campus. Only four students did not experience this, which reveals the prevalence of this type of discrimination and racism.

#### *Rude Treatment*

Many students talked about receiving rude treatment while patronizing various businesses. Students from all three universities experienced this, either in their hometowns, campus towns, or elsewhere. The behavior from whites included acting impolite, ignoring Latinos, unnecessary surveillance (which will be further discussed later), slow service, and so on.

That does happen a lot. When you go to a store, the people that work there, I notice that they've always, they always look at suspicious people. And suspicious to them is not white. And so they follow us around and not make sure we're gonna shoplift or something. And at restaurants, I've noticed that they're not as they should be...what's the word I'm looking for? You know smiley and

friendly. They put on like a frown. They don't serve like they should.  
Southwest University Female 19

This student from Southwest University points out that the catalyst for the rude behavior that she has encountered is her race. Because she is a Latina, she is automatically seen as suspicious. There is a lack of politeness from people whose job it is to provide customer service. Several students had similar experiences.

Yeah, in the malls. And in the suburbs. Definitely that's a risk. Like, they ignore you. Oh, especially in the grocery store, because I actually get WIC. I get help from the government. And when they see, the people at Jewell, the cashiers, when they see that, you know I have WIC, they totally don't even say "hi." They don't say "bye." They throw your stuff in the bag. They get mad. And this has happened to me like 90 percent of the time that I go and get my stuff for WIC. And it's to the point where I don't even want to go anymore. I'd rather not even have that help and struggle, because it's like these people are treating me so bad. . . You go in the grocery store and it feels horrible. Just like, you just want to tell them "It's not my fault. You know, I'm really trying to make it here." Female 21, Midwest University

For this student, just going to the grocery store has become something that she hates doing because of the way she's treated by the cashiers. Once store employees see that she is getting government assistance, their behavior toward her becomes extremely disrespectful. There is a complete lack of courtesy and this student senses the employees are angry about helping her. It makes this student almost regret that she is using the assistance at all. It would be easier in some ways to go without it and just struggle, than to use it and get treated so badly.

Many students talked about negative treatment they've received from whites in restaurants. One pattern that came up was whites ignoring them, either when they are trying to order or trying to get seated.

Since I'm young I like to try new things out so when I go to like a different restaurant, on campus there's a restaurant. I've never been to it in my four years, but I tried it out just last week, me and my friend who is Latina. And the service there was just kind of rude, how they treated us. They didn't pay attention to us, or they didn't do that much service to us. But as soon as we saw the clean-up boy, the bus boy, he was Latino, we were talking to him in Spanish. And he was talking to us and treating us good. But as soon as the waitress saw him talking to us, she told him "Oh, this other table needs more water." Trying to get him away from us and it was like kinda rude. So, I won't be eating there any longer. And my friend, we both felt out of place, so that's why we're never going to go back there. [On-campus] It's not part of the campus, but it's on one of the streets right on, in campus, like right there. Midwest University Male 21

This restaurant is near the Midwest University campus and despite its convenient location, this student and his friend will not go back there, because of the treatment that they received. Not only did they feel out of place in that environment, but they were also basically ignored in terms of receiving service. The one person who *was* nice to them was a Latino bus boy, but he was prevented from giving them service by a waitress. Some students talked about how they sometimes received better service than whites when there were Latinos working in a restaurant. In this case, this was prevented from happening. A student from Southern University also experienced rude treatment at a nearby restaurant.

Oh yeah. That's a good one. Yeah, that really bothers me. As a matter of fact, we went to one of the places on campus. I won't say the name, but if you go on Friday or Saturday, it's pretty bad. Like, it wasn't that busy, which is why I don't understand. The waiter kind of just, well, we were a big group, and we were all Mexicans. And he just like, he gave us our drinks, he didn't even check in on us at all. The food came late. It was really bad. But yeah, [inaudible.] I was like "Well we weren't that big." I was like "There was like five of us." So I was just like, you know—and that's happened a lot. I don't know if that's just because they're tired or they're having a bad day or something. Um, me and my dad had experienced that too. We went to a steak place. He came to visit me a couple of weeks ago, and same thing. I kind of felt out of place there, because we were the only Mexicans there, and I was like "Oh, that's kinda weird." It was like a more expensive restaurant, so a lot of rich, older people. Just like middle-

aged so. [Same thing with the service?] Yeah, just bad service. Like they really don't care. And you kind of have to like, "Here's my drink. Fill it up," because it's been there for like 10 minutes and you're just like. So, and then the appetizer comes out right when the meal comes out so, and I'm like "hmmm." So, I don't know. Southern University Male 20

A variety of issues came up when this student went out to eat. On the first occasion, he received shoddy service, the waiter was not attentive, and the food came late. Though it is possible it was because of the size of the party, it seems unlikely. On the second occasion, when he was out with his father, again the servers were inattentive. He had to take it upon himself to point out that he needed a drink refill, because the server was unconcerned. Additionally, more subtle discourtesies occurred, like the appetizer coming out when the meal came out. Another issue one student faced was just trying to get into a restaurant in the first place.

We went to a nice restaurant and this was my actually whole family. And it was probably a Friday or Saturday—busy night and we were put on a list to wait and we just noticed that plenty of people were going ahead of us. You know, parties of the same size or smaller size, no matter what. Then when we went to like see if our name was on the list and it wasn't on the list, so. I don't know if that was a mistake maybe someone could've made or something—[Were whites the ones who were seated?] Yeah—mmm hmm. Southwest University Male 21

This incident occurred when the student lived in Idaho. Though it is possible that a mistake was made, this student was not sure. It stuck out in his mind as a time when he was treated rudely because of his race. It is difficult to know whether these offenses are racist or truly just honest mistakes made by the wait staff. However, there is a pattern here that many students experience in different regions of the country, which leads me to believe that it goes beyond just incompetent servers. Additionally, it takes energy and effort on the part of the student to figure out and assess whether this was an accident or

racism. The result of this is energy loss. Feagin and Sikes (1994) found this to be true with African Americans and we see a similar pattern for Latinos. “Having to assess potentially discriminatory situations carefully before responding can create strain on the energy and psyche of African Americans. What is at stake is often more than whether one is right in a particular assessment” (Feagin and Sikes 1994, 277). One student I spoke with has decided to avoid the American restaurants and stores altogether, as a way to minimize this stressful situation in her life.

I don't really eat out. [laughs] And if I do, I don't go to quote/unquote American restaurants. . .I'll go to the very Mexican immigrant restaurants. Aside from being extremely affordable, those are the people that I can identify the most with. So I don't, McDonald's, Burger King, or even any other like, Fuddrucker's or whatever other quote/unquote American restaurants. I won't go there. And it's true, when I have the service has been poor or there's a noticeable difference between the treatment of us as customers versus people who are white. And I guess the perception would be that the white people would tip more, because they have got money. And as far as the stores, I go to the thrift stores. Like I won't even go there. I don't go to the malls, it's too much. I've already been through too much of this. I've been through it all my life. It's no fun for me to subject myself to that anymore. Southern University Female 26

The negative experiences this student has had in the past impacts her decisions about where to eat and where to shop. She no longer goes to “American” restaurants or stores, because she does not want to deal with the inevitable mistreatment that she will receive there. She also points out that there is probably an assumption made by servers that Latinos do not have much money and therefore will not tip, so provide noticeably worse service to them compared to whites. Another student from Midwest University also noticed this trend.

Or they'll come up and they'll just uh, almost feel like “Oh, these people are really bad tippers, so I really don't have to worry about how I serve this table.” Or they'll never bring water back to the table, and I'll be like “What the hell? I



drank my water half an hour ago and I'm about to finish my meal. I'm thirsty. Could I get some service to finish it?" Midwest University Female 24

It is interesting how this behavior from whites becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of the bad service they provide based on the assumption of getting a bad tip, they create a situation where they deserve a bad tip. The father of one respondent went out of his way to leave a large tip despite the rude treatment from his white server, just to prove the stereotype wrong.

### *Other Assumptions*

Students shared more assumptions that they encountered from whites when they were dining out or shopping. In one case, whites assumed that this student was an employee, rather than a customer.

I was in Wal-mart with my friend and a lady came up to me and said "What are you doing back here? You're supposed to be in the back packing boxes." I then told her that I didn't have the honor and distinction of being a Wal-mart employee. Southwest University Male 26

It did not occur to the white woman in Wal-mart that she was interacting with a customer. She assumed, based on his race, that not only did he work there, but also that he was slacking off. Other students talked about assumptions around language. For example, this student from Southwest University noticed at her job that Latino customers and employees are treated badly because of the language barrier.

I wouldn't say that I've experienced it, but working in the store, I experience people, some co-workers, saying things such as "This is America. You should know how to speak English" and stuff like that. And then the majority of our workers are Spanish people in both the places that I've worked in [town.] And even sometimes from upper management, you hear racist comments about how they should be speaking English, this is America. And so they kind of treat the customer different than they would anybody else, because they get frustrated

because they can't communicate with them. It's all about the communication.  
Southwest University Female 21

This student has heard racist comments at work, as well as seen customers being treated badly because of communication problems. Another issue that students encountered was assumptions from whites that they do not speak English.

Yeah, one of my friends actually, I think it was at A&M or was it at Tulsa? I don't know— one of those places. It was at Tulsa. One of my friends from A&M went to go visit my other friend in Tulsa and, one of the ladies there, they were ordering food. . .And she was telling [her friend] what to say just because, when you're not in a place you're familiar with, you kind of have someone order for you or whatever. And so she was telling them that, and then the lady that was behind the counter had a question and so she started trying to ask her in Spanish. Right away, like she immediately assumed that she didn't speak English. And so she was really upset about that. And that's, but that's probably the only thing.  
Southern University Female 18

Rather than frustration about a Latino person speaking Spanish, here we see a white person assuming that a Latino customer cannot speak English. Though her friend was just helping her get a feel for how to order, the clerk behind the counter misunderstood this and assumed she should conduct the transaction in Spanish.

A related question that students were asked was whether or not they have experienced whites being served before them (even if they were the next person in line) or if they have received slow service from whites. About half of the respondents did not report having this experience, so this seemed to occur less than getting bad service. Those who had encountered it talked about things like not being greeted by whites when they entered a store, whites cutting in line in front of them, whites receiving better service at restaurants, and people staring at them. One student from Southern University pointed out how normative this treatment has become. "Yeah, that's, that's pretty much,

that's normal. Anything outside of that I would be very surprised. I don't think I've really ever experienced anything different." Another student I talked with shared a negative experience that she had at a clinic.

Mmm—not to me. If anything I think where I've seen a lot of discrimination would be in like clinics and health facilities. Whenever I was young, I hate going to the doctor, because my parent's never had health insurance. And the insurance that we got was the insurance by the government that they give you. I don't know what it's called. . . sometimes you're not treated very well. I remember being this tall [gestures,] whenever I started talking, my parents were always like, "You have to learn English. You have to learn English." I was the first one, I'm the oldest. I always had to translate. And it was really frustrating when you go to the hospital and people are mistreating you or thinking you're not going to understand them. And so, it was, it's really hard. I mean, I guess because I always had to go along with my mom to translate, so it's really frustrating to see people not treat you with the same amount of respect as they would someone else. Because they know they can take advantage of you and you're not going to say anything. And so, they can get away with it because of the language barrier. And I mean, you're young, so they don't expect you to say anything back. But, even their tone of voice, it's just, different. Southern University Female 19

For this student, going to the doctor was something that was a very bad experience.

Because of the language barrier, she felt that the staff treated her and her family even worse, because they could get away with it. And she also felt that this impacted the quality of the care they received.

Probably the most extreme stories about this were shared by a student from Southwest University. While traveling with his team, he experienced on two occasions restaurants that were practically, if not entirely, segregated by race.

And there is a restaurant in Amarillo. . . And they had a sign that said "No Hispanic or Blacks allowed after 11." [Are you serious?] Yes. That was a city ordinance. It was like, not a city ordinance, but it was passed because they had issues with it in the past, so they had that sign and the cops allowed it. The only reason we were allowed to eat there at that time was because our coach was from Iowa. But, yeah that's the reason why we were allowed to eat there—It was in Louisiana, we were at a McDonald's. . . . And uh, it was weird because it was the

white section and there was a black section, and then here we come in. And, we didn't know where to sit! We just sat in the middle and everybody was just staring at us. Southwest University Male 26

These accounts go beyond just serving whites first. At the first restaurant, a city ordinance allowed restaurants to stop serving Latino and blacks after a certain time. Granted, these are stories from when this student was in high school, which presumably was about 10 years ago, so it's possible (and hopefully the case) that the ordinance has been lifted. However, for this kind of treatment to be present in the late-90s, during an era when segregation is no longer legal, is very disturbing. In the second instance, Latinos in a segregated restaurant in Louisiana faced confusion about where they fit in. They chose to say in the middle, provoking stares from the locals.

### **Unnecessary Surveillance**

Most of the students experienced receiving unnecessary surveillance when they were shopping. This is another form of mistreatment that they experienced off-campus and only seven students did not report this happening to them. A few students noticed how this happened in high-end stores, though this treatment was not limited to those types of establishments.

This man just followed me and my friend around the whole store. It was so embarrassing. We were trying to, and the purses were all like really expensive. Like, the cheapest one might have been like \$400. And for the style it was expensive. . . And so like, I went back to it. I didn't buy anything that day because I felt so freakin' uncomfortable. He was like, literally, eyeing us. He was behind this counter this whole time, but if we walked to this end of the store, he was walking to the end of the store. And neither of us looked like, I mean she looks just like I do, we're just like some girls, you know? And like the whole time he followed us in the store. It was so rude. I went back with my boyfriend, and like I picked out the purse and just bought it or whatever, and I told him, "That man followed [us] the whole time we were in the store last time and it was

so weird you know?” And he’s like “What an asshole!” And I was just like “Yeah, what an asshole!” [laughs] Midwest University Female 21

The surveillance that this student encountered made her so uncomfortable that she had to leave the store and come back at a different time with her boyfriend to purchase the bag she wanted. Though she had money to spend in this store, the person working there treated her as though she was going to steal something. Several of the students talked about similar things happening to them as well. One student from Midwest University talked about how she felt that whites’ stereotypes about Latinos could be contributing to this situation. “And so, yes, at stores it’s problematic, because again there’s an overall criminalization in the media here of Latinos, especially because of this immigration issue. It’s just like, ‘You’re probably a wetback. You’re probably an illegal alien,’ . . . And so um, there’s definitely problems when you go to stores. There’s definitely racial profiling all over the place. Yes, it’s happened to me before. To the point where I’ve had to go up to someone and say something. ”

A student from Southwest University discusses how surveillance is not limited to just one store. He has also been followed around a shopping center.

I’ve been in the mall and had security officers seem like he’s following me or the group of friends I’m with. Could be a coincidence that he’s walking the same path we are, but it’s kinda odd that every time he seems to be following us or goes into the same stores. Or even employees they might just kinda keep a closer eye on you. Southwest University Male 21

Surveillance is not just something that happens in high-end stores, but can happen pretty much anywhere. This student jokingly entertains the idea that perhaps this was a coincidence, but it seems to be an unlikely one.

A student from Southern University points out the transparency of whites' intentions when they are surveilling Latinos.

Being asked probably more than somebody you know, "Can I help you with something?" And I think, they think they're probably hiding it. Like "Oh, I'm, I'm being really helpful." But you're like, "Okay you've already asked me? Or like several people have already asked me." You're kind of feel like "Okay, no." You start feeling tense. Southern University Female 30

Previously, we saw how Latinos were frustrated that they were not getting service in a restaurant or a store. However, in this case, whites are providing too much service as a way to keep track of Latino customers. Another student comments that she feels powerless to do anything about this situation.

I know that I'm being watched and I know that I'll get followed at the different stores that I go to. But I just, at this point, I can't even get angry anymore. I did think it's unnecessary but, I mean there's not much I can do to change that just yet. So until I'm in a position of power, I'm really not even gonna start. Southern University Female 26

This student cannot spend the energy to get emotional about being surveilled anymore. It is something that occurs so often, that it is not worth it to get frustrated, because it would be hard to change.

Finally, a student talks about how a friend of his who works in retail was given specific instructions on how to treat various customers.

One of my friends who works at Best Buy and you know that's obviously a place that's pretty high shoplifting and that type of thing. And he actually is, the managers and like the whole department heads are actually taught to profile people. Or at least that's what he said. You know they're taught to profile people that come in, people that are potential customers. You know like, you wanna get these people, because these people are gonna buy, are gonna make you money. Whereas these people, they're not really gonna spend much, so don't spend your time on these people. . . One of my school friends, we went to Best Buy on Friday, last Friday, also. We went to Best Buy and got no help at all, and also I felt kind of like, there was this one guy that was there and he kept like

looking at us. Like you could tell it was just a [inaudible.] And so they kind of just like follow you around. And one of my friends, the same thing, one of my Hispanic friends, he had mentioned something about that. He has tattoos, so I guess he's like, it's always like they're following him. So yeah, he was real mad about that. It happened to him a few days before. He was real pissed so.  
Southern University Male 20

Surveillance seems to happen in two ways in this particular store. On the one hand, potential buyers are identified, so if you are not deemed to be a big buyer, it is difficult to get service. At the same time, Latinos are also profiled as potential shoplifters.

### **Anger towards Spanish or Accent Off-campus**

Students have already commented on how whites reacted to Spanish on their campuses. I also asked them to talk about any experiences that occurred off campus. For some of the respondents, these incidents were more likely to happen off campus than on. However, there were many similarities between white's responses in both places, which indicate the pervasiveness of whites' opposition to Latinos using Spanish. Only five students did not report having a negative experience from whites about Spanish off campus.

*"You're in America!" Again...*

Students talked about hearing comments from whites about speaking Spanish being incompatible with living in America. This pattern was also very prevalent off campus as well. Five of the students reported this type of response from whites.

Oh I had a horrible experience at an airport. I was with my mother and she was talking to me in Spanish, because she feels comfortable talking in her native tongue. And I was answering to her in Spanish and a drunk, white woman looked at us. And she was like "You're in America, you speak English here." And I said "Are you serious? Do you know what the racial composition is here in the United States? I mean like, this is absolutely absurd that you'd ask me to stop speaking in my native tongue. If I have something to say to you, believe me, I'll

be the first person to say it to you. I wouldn't have a problem.'" And she was upset, she's like "I don't want you speaking Spanish." I said "Well, I don't want you sitting in front of me interrupting my conversation either. You're invading my privacy. I have the right to speak whatever tongue I speak in. And English is *not* the national language of this country, I'm sorry. And if it was then you'd have a problem, because the majority of the people who live in this country would not speak English. Whether or not people should learn it is a different question. Whether or not you feel people should learn it is a different question." And that is something that we always have to struggle against—is people's perception of who and what should be spoken in this country. It's—amazing.  
Midwest University Female 24

For some reason, a white woman felt compelled to interrupt this student and her mother while they were talking to inform them about her disdain for Spanish. Because of white privilege in our society, whites feel that they can somehow impose their will on total strangers that are minding their own business, breaking the norms of social behavior. This encounter exemplifies the widely-held belief that the United States should adopt English as its official language. This student goes on to talk about how whites are allowed to learn and use other languages, but for some reason it is unacceptable for Latinos to use their native tongues, which she also feels is a racist double standard.

A few students talked about how this phenomenon happens frequently and in many different contexts. One student from Southwest University mostly had this experience in her workplace. Though she could not recall one specific instance because there were a number that happened between her two jobs, she did indicate that it was something that occurred often. A student from Midwest University shares a specific incident he recalled.

Oh it happens everywhere. Like we could be at a restaurant, shopping at a grocery store, and the cashier could be white or it could be any other race. And



the lady who's paying could be a Latina or whatever. She's speaking Spanish and the customer service could be like "Uh, we're in America. English only." And I was like "What the hell?" Like, I understand we're in America, but try to help her out. Midwest University Male 21

Once again we see a customer service person not doing their job and instead making it more difficult for a Spanish speaker. Another student talked about how he was officially forbidden to speak Spanish during his time in the military.

You're only allowed to speak in a foreign tongue, but you're mostly required to speak English. [So you couldn't do it?] Oh, we did it anyways and our bosses never, ever, they could care less. And never had an issue with it. There was a civilian liaison. . . He was a police officer and he was from Pennsylvania. And he said that he found it rude for people to speak in Spanish at restaurants, being that you're in the United States. Of course, we told him that—He had never really been exposed and we educated him. Because he made the case that um, the constitution was written in English, therefore it was ....I said "yeah, but it never said you can't speak another language." Southwest University Male 26

Though the official policy forbade speaking other languages, this student still spoke Spanish with his fellow troops. The fact that there is such a policy is interesting in and of itself. Additionally, he talked about one white person's justification for why people should speak English. His rationale is that since the Constitution is written in English, only English should be allowed. This argument is ridiculous, as the student points out to him. For many whites however, being American is closely tied with speaking English. Learning another language by choice is acceptable for whites, as long as English comes first or is primary.

#### *Differential Treatment Because of an Accent*

Even when Latinos speak English, they can still be treated differently or discriminated against if they have an accent. A few students noticed this phenomenon occurring off campus.

Yes, especially with my mom. Like, she would go up to my brother's school. She has a real, like she doesn't even have any accent. You could understand what she saying. She uses clear English. And at the school, she was telling me that the faculty there, they pretend they don't understand her. And she's like "I don't understand why they do that. Why do they make me feel that I don't know what I'm saying or whatever." They totally do that like, if you have an accent...like even I've got comments from people that I work with, like dancing. They feel comfortable telling me their prejudices [inaudible] or whatever. And especially when they speak Spanish, like in the grocery stores, people will roll their eyes or give them dirty looks. And it just makes it a really uncomfortable atmosphere. Female 21, Midwest University

Though this student's mother speaks clear English, for some reason whites still cannot understand her. The student's impression is whites are pretending that there is a lack of comprehension there, because she cannot understand how they could not know what her mother was saying. Even an accent that is not strong is offensive to whites and they react with discriminatory behavior.

A student from Southwest University also discusses how this impacts her parents. She feels that people think less of her parents because they have accents.

Well, because my parents; they don't speak perfectly. And they're always being not taken, uh they aren't respected. They like, they don't take them seriously. They aren't acknowledged, I guess when they hear that they can't, they have an accent. Southwest University Female 19

Without knowing any other information about her parents, whites automatically assume that because they speak English with an accent that they lack credibility and are not deserving of their respect. There is an assumption that people who speak Spanish or have Spanish accents are not good people, not intelligent, or not to be listened to (see also: Lippi-Green 1997.) If they had British accents, one wonders if the same would be true.

*“The Look”*

As discussed previously, students sometimes did not encounter direct discrimination from whites when it comes to language, but instead there were more subtle ways that whites expressed their prejudice against Spanish. Most often this was in the form of “the look.”

Like I told you, they just give us like this look. And I mean, it doesn't bother me. It's like “Okay, well you're just going to have to deal with it.” You know, it's not really my problem. Like I've known some people who only know how to speak Spanish, like they don't know any English at all. And when I do talk to that person, when there's like white people around, I mean, like I told you, we get these looks. And, they just feel uncomfortable. . . Or even, or even at work. Like there's this, there's these customers that that want to speak Spanish. . . and yeah, then I start talking to them in Spanish. And I just notice that people will just get like, I mean they give you like these looks and it just feels so uncomfortable. So they think like we're talking bad about them or something. So, which I mean, I can understand. Southwest University Male 20

The looks that whites give Latinos when they speak Spanish create an uncomfortable and hostile environment. For this student, it does not dissuade him from using Spanish, especially at his job when he is trying to help people. But he still notices the hostility in the looks he receives. A student from Southern University also has noticed this happening to her in stores and says that it is something that has been going on since she was young. She also shares a story about a small town in her state taking extreme measures against the Spanish language and immigrants.

I think it comes to that Spanish can get the negative stereotype. Because I don't know it's just like, there's certain expectations that associate with it so. And kinda like in [names town,] I don't know if you've heard—they're trying to, I don't know if it's passed, but—they're trying to make the city, I guess to cater less towards immigrants. They're trying to make it English only. They're trying to make their landowners or the apartment owners not lease anything to, um, you have to have papers. They'll be fined if they lease it to immigrants. So, Spanish is like. . . And they were saying that...the level of schools were lowered because

of Hispanic students. And then, they were also saying, I heard the mayor. . .he said that “they’re gonna push for it because they haven’t got a lot of negative emails and all this, and blah blah blah.” And I got really mad, because how many Hispanic people have computers? How many Hispanic people know how to send an email? So I sent in an email. And I’m just like “okay, that’s ‘inadequate.’” Southern University Female 19

“Spanish can get the negative stereotype.” This statement says a lot about the issue that whites have with this language. To whites, Spanish represents illegal immigrants, the “dumbing-down” of schools, as well as other negative associations. This disdain for Spanish is so strong in the community this student talks about, that they are working on passing a city ordinance to ban its usage in housing rental agreements (Sandoval 2006.) This student points out that the mayor’s rationale for supporting this ordinance is horribly flawed. Not only is it likely that many Latinos may not have email access to send in their complaints, but it is likely that the information about the complaint process is only in English!

### *Pressure to Assimilate*

Some students commented on the obligation they felt to either speak only in English or to not speak in Spanish. There is some degree of pressure on them to assimilate to the majority culture.

I do 100 percent definitely see that. With everyone pretty much. I even want to say with Hispanics themselves. Me and my cousins are completely different. We don’t speak, but at the same they do have this Americanized way of living, whereas with me I do have the Americanized living, but I also do kinda see my Hispanic roots and I do kind of respect that. It’s just “Why can’t you learn the language? Why can’t you perfect it? Why can’t you do this? Why can’t you be the subject to our norm? Because if you’re not, then you are going to be automatically an outsider. We’re going to make sure you’re an outsider, because we don’t like the way that you’re talking about. Or the way that you speak or the language that you speak.” So it’s, there’s so much anger out there. Midwest University Male 20

For this student, there was pressure from some of his family members to conform, which in this case meant to perfect English. He saw them as being more assimilated or Americanized and because of this, they were expecting him to be the same way. He points out that if you are unwilling to adapt to the norm, then often you are seen as an outsider. A student from Southern University has overheard similar comments in reference to immigrants.

But I've definitely heard people say things like "Oh, you know if Mexican immigrants are gonna come here then they need to learn Spanish [means English] and this and that." And basically criticizing, people that are not learning English fast enough or well enough. And, I definitely don't agree with that mentality. I think that if you, well if you do move to a country, you should learn the language. Because otherwise you won't have very much success, if you can't integrate yourself into that society and try to get a good job and whatnot. But at the same time, this is a good example. There's a lot of Americans that go to Spain every year and honestly, I would say less than half the people from my two semesters there...less than half the people there really cared to learn Spanish. So a lot of people will go there; they'll party, they'll hang out with American people, and they don't really care so much to speak Spanish. But then I'm like "You guys are the same people that criticize Mexicans who come here." There is a difference between living somewhere for a short amount of time and other people that plan to be here extended amount of time, but still it's pretty much the same concept. If you go to a country and if you're gonna be there for more than three or four months you should try to learn the language. . .But they just, I think it's almost like American mentality, that they don't necessarily need to, "Everybody needs to learn English, so when I go to another country I can have somebody to speak to. But when you come here you need to learn English." Southern University Female 21

This student seems to both sympathetic and somewhat critical of immigrants who do not yet know English. She acknowledges that it is unreasonable for whites to expect Latinos to learn English overnight. However, she does believe that if immigrants are planning to reside in a country, then they need to learn the language, just as traveling Americans should know the languages of the countries they visit. So there is a level of expectation

that Latinos should assimilate to the mainstream, rather than the mainstream adapting for this new group. She also made an observation about America. To her, there is an arrogance about language in this country. Americans expect everyone to know English wherever they go and that the world should accommodate that. It is an ethnocentric idea that seems to be at the heart of the language debate in America.

On a different note, a few students talked about how they limit their own use of Spanish, which is also evidence of the pressure that exists to assimilate.

Mmmm, well not in [names hometown] for sure. But, here maybe. . . Maybe like when I went to a mall or a movie or something and I just felt—I really don't speak Spanish elsewhere. Like I speak it with my Hispanic friend and I call friends from back home. And when I know some people, somebody that knows how to speak it, but I really don't speak it elsewhere. Southern University Male 18

In this student's hometown, he felt comfortable speaking Spanish all the time, because the town is predominantly Latino. Now that he has relocated, he does not speak Spanish as much, only with a friend of his or others that know how to speak Spanish, but not to the degree that he did before. Another student talked about an interesting issue that came up when she was doing a summer internship that exemplifies the level of assimilation that some Latinos face.

They had some of the students come from Monterrey Tech to do internships there, and they're interaction with the Hispanic community that were already there was another dynamic. I mean, it was kind of a racism within a race. [What was that interaction like?] The Mexican kids, they expected to respond to them in Spanish. Like if you talked, you know we went into a restaurant, if you asked for your food in Spanish that they would respond. And sometimes the waiters wouldn't. I mean, they would be Hispanic, I don't know if they didn't know Spanish or not, but some of them would not. Well at first I was like "Well, it's different here." I know as far as like my husband and his family; they would be punished if they talked Spanish in school. So they never taught their kids Spanish. So I said you know "That's the culture that you're coming into and the culture where they're kind of like told not to. Not to speak their language." And

they're like "But they understand me. Why?" They couldn't understand why, you know, "I'm trying, I'm talking to you in Spanish" and they're not responding. And sometimes they would tell me "But I know they talk Spanish. I saw them at the store and they talked to their co-worker in Spanish, but they wouldn't talk Spanish to me." And so they kind of felt like, they were being treated differently just because they weren't Mexican American. That was, it was interesting. It was very interesting. Southern University Female 30

The students from Monterrey Tech did not understand why Latinos in the United States would not speak Spanish with them. There was an assumption the part of the students from Mexico that all Latinos in the United States would know Spanish, which, as the respondent points out, is not the case. She even mentioned earlier she had stopped speaking and learning Spanish at age 6. Her explanation about why Latinos were not speaking Spanish illustrates how assimilation regarding language plays out. Some Latinos were and are punished for speaking Spanish, so it then becomes something that does not get passed along to future generations. Because of how Spanish is viewed by whites in the U.S., Latinos may choose not to speak it even when they do know it, in order to avoid negative sanctions. Though this was odd to the students from Mexico, it is quite normative in this country.

### **Physical Discomfort and Staring**

Many students also experienced more covert or subtle racism. They were asked to talk about any experiences where whites showed physical discomfort around them or were staring at them. Only three students did not report encountering this or did not know someone who had if they hadn't experienced it directly themselves. Often these subtle types of discrimination by whites included actions like staring, rolling their eyes, grabbing their purse or valuable items, and so on.

*Staring and “The Look”*

We have heard students talk about “the look” usually in reference to speaking Spanish. However, there are other times when students have noticed this behavior from whites. Additionally, some students have noticed whites staring at them, which is another way of creating discomfort for Latinos. It can be a means of social control, as this student points out.

I think the issue of ghetto-ness, that ended up ghetto-ness. I’m sure that when you see Latinos, you know, laughing loudly, or something, being rambunctious; that they, I’m sure they think like “Oh God!” You know, “They’re so loud.” Because you see the looks, and you see body language. You feel uncomfortable by those things. But they don’t, you know. I think that they would have too much an issue confronting something like that if they had a problem with it.  
Midwest University Female 24

Here we see whites using body language and negative looks as a way to sanction what they feel is inappropriate behavior from Latinos. Whites are less likely to directly confront Latinos, so the “look” is a way to create an uncomfortable atmosphere to get Latinos to do what they want. In this case, she feels that if she is with a group of her friends having a good time, that whites will judge them as lower class or something similar.

I have noticed like, once again going back to like what I was talking about before, like the snubbing, or like the big “Oh” [sighs,] they turn away, or I guess a really bad look. Like turning around and sighing “Who are these people?” kind of look. . .Or like you can tell like they’re saying something, because you’re obviously not with other people there. You feel like they’re talking about you based on the the look, and they’ll turn around [and] whisper something to somebody. It’s happened to me. I’ve seen it happen. . .Like sometimes you’re so used to things, you’re just like, you know what I mean. Like it’s just like not even a big deal to you anymore. You just like move on with your life. Midwest University Female 23



This student has noticed how “the look” is sometimes accompanied by other negative behavior. She has sensed that whites have been talking about her to each other and has noticed them sighing with some sort of disgust. Over time and as this keeps happening, this student has become accustomed to receiving this type of treatment from whites. She no longer lets it bother her.

Another student finds comfort being with other Latinos where she will not encounter this type of mistreatment by whites. She finds that anywhere outside of her comfort zone, she will have to deal with this kind of discrimination.

But “the look” like I said, “the look” is just something that happens all the time. Everywhere you go. Except as far as when you’re in, within your own group, right? Like I said those Mexican restaurants and stuff like that. You don’t get that. But when I’m outside of that society, out of that community, that look; it’s a very hostile thing. And they may not mean to like point a finger at you or flip you off or anything, but that look projects enough to where, unless you’re out to get arrested, you’re not going to go and challenge that. I mean, there’s too many people giving you that look to even think you can make a difference. Right, come on! Southern University Female 26

Though a look seems like it would be innocuous, this student points out that it can actually be very hostile. It is threatening to the point that she knows there is nothing that she can do about it, because confronting it, especially when it’s coming from so many sources, is risky. Therefore for this student, it is easier to avoid being in that situation in the first place. Aside from the potential risk in confronting this behavior, another student points out the complexity of trying to approach it.

It’s such a big issue that I know they don’t say it. With me sometimes my judgment on uh, vibes, tones, tones of voice, judgments, looks. And, oh, you sometimes feel it, but you kinda want to ignore it, because you don’t want to make a big deal. Because they could be saying “Oh, I wasn’t doing it? Why are you doing this now? I wasn’t doing it.” And that could bring up some...issues. And as delicate as it, that you know that they might be thinking it, but we don’t

know they're thinking it. So it's that possibility that they might. [What do you think they might be thinking?] I mean, they could be supporting their point, they could be open-minded. I don't know; that's a hard question. Midwest University Male 18

This student points out that much of the time, the mistreatment he receives from whites comes in the form of very subtle actions. He senses a vibe or a tone that is not obvious or clearly visible, but is something that he feels. And because of the covert nature of this discrimination, it is difficult to confront it, because it would be easy for whites to deny that they were doing anything in the first place.

#### *Assumptions about Criminality*

Students also discussed whites behaving in subtle ways that infer they are fearful that Latinos are criminals or that they will be harmed by Latinos. Students talked about things like whites crossing the street, not sitting by them, or taking inventory of their possessions when they are near a Latino.

They feel unsafe. There's an issue of safety. But that goes with racial profiling and just the overall criminalization of Latinos and blacks historically. [Have you noticed it?] Mmm hmm, mmm hmm. Move out of the way when they're walking on the sidewalk. They'll like move to the complete other side of the sidewalk, because they're afraid we'll push them or something. It's like, it's not gonna happen. It's—just this issue of what kind of morals and values we hold as Latinos and blacks. They must think we have none sometimes. Midwest University Female 24

The message that whites send when they do things like cross the street when a Latino is approaching is that they feel Latinos are dangerous and immoral. There is an irrational fear that they are unsafe when a person of color is around them based on stereotypes about Latinos. One student also noticed this assumption of criminality the day before I talked with him.

Yesterday, there was, I think, this business guy. They were talking about PH and RAs and investments and all this stuff. And this, like teenager...he walked in and stuff and he had his hood on and he's, you know. And the guy like, kinda just touched his um, I'm guessing his laptop bag. And then he had suitcase, because I think he was going on a business trip. And then he went like this—touched his front pocket. I'm guessing his cell phone was there. His back one, the wallet. And then from there he just crossed his hands again. And I was like “Did this just happen?” I was like “Wow....the he uh....Wow.” Midwest University Male 18

This white business man did a full inventory of all the valuables he had with him when a Latino teenager entered the elevator with him. Again this sends a message that Latinos are dangerous and that they have a propensity toward stealing—they are criminals. A student from Southwest University shared a similar story.

I've seen it as a matter of fact. Actually, when was this? I think it was a few months ago. There was this one guy walking down the street. And he did, he did look like of Mexican descent or something. And I think this one lady, I mean she had her purse; she had a like pretty big jacket too. Then all of a sudden, as soon as she saw the guy, she like put her purse inside her jacket or something. I was like “Well, he's not gonna do anything?” But, yeah, I've seen that a few times. Southwest University Male 20

This woman did not take inventory of her possessions but instead just hid them from view, assuming she was at risk. These examples show how systemic racism has permeated our society. Just walking by someone of color triggers this racist response. Another student noticed “the clutching of the purse or couples, sometimes, you know, the girl will just hold closer to the guy...hold onto the guy...grab the guy's arm all of a sudden...for whatever reason.” The reason is that whites feel they are at risk, because a person of color is near them.

One student mentioned that she feels men experience this more so than women. She noticed a difference between what she encountered versus what her brother encountered from whites.

I haven't noticed, once again with me. I think that it's very different for females than males. Like I said with my brother, I know he's definitely noticed that and I've noticed people feel more uncomfortable if we're walking together. I've noticed people get out the way or you know, whereas I don't think that happens when I'm by myself. [So men are seen as more of a threat?] Um, yeah I think that people think in general men are more of a threat. And then, it's a young man, who has brown skin; I think that doesn't help anything. I mean my little father is probably going to get that a lot less now than he did when he was 30 or 25.  
Midwest University Female 24 medical student

She has not noticed whites behaving this way when she is alone, but when she is with her brother, then all of sudden people are getting out of the way and there is a clear level of discomfort. She believes that being young and male and Latino makes her brother seem like more of a threat to whites. She speculates that her father probably encountered that kind of behavior from whites more when he was younger than he does now. However, her father is also the judge mentioned earlier, who was questioned by the police for walking around his neighborhood in the middle of the day. The perception of a threat or of danger was still there.

## **Conclusion**

Off-campus racism was something that all of the students encountered in one way or another. Many faced mistreatment by the police themselves or knew someone close to them who did. This often went beyond just getting pulled over without a good reason, but in some cases resulted in an ordeal—getting pulled out of the car and forced to do sobriety tests, being harassed about drugs, or even having guns pulled on them.

Almost all of the students faced mistreatment in a store or restaurant, whether it was being ignored, people treating them rudely, or feeling like they were under surveillance. Students faced discrimination based on their language usage, again facing “the look” from whites expressing contempt for the Spanish language. Latinos also faced racism when doing something as simple as walking down the street or boarding an elevator. Again, many of them faced the assumption by whites that Latinos are criminally-minded or somehow threatening to them. Many of the patterns that students experienced off campus were similar to those that students faced on campus, which indicates the pervasiveness of racism and discrimination in contemporary society.

Students responded to these issues in much the same ways as previously expressed. Some retreated from mostly white areas, avoiding stores and restaurants where they could face this treatment. Some confronted it, even when the racism came from officers of the law. Others accepted it as normative; something they should come to expect when shopping or trying to purchase a meal. What is key is the fact that every student had at least one account of discrimination off campus, even if they did not have much to say about on-campus experiences.

For some, the racism they faced interfered with daily tasks, which had to be energy draining for them. Some dreaded going to the grocery store because of how badly they were treated by whites. Others talked about how they faced mistreatment when they spoke in their native tongues on the bus or at the doctor’s office. Even trying to eat a meal at restaurants near campus was a challenge. Feagin and Sikes found that

African Americans felt that great deal of their energy was wasted because of racist encounters.

“If you can think of the mind has having 100 ergs of energy, and the average man used 50 percent of his energy dealing with the everyday problems of the world—just general kinds of things—then he has 50 percent more to do creative kinds of things that he wants to do. Now that’s a white person. Now a black person also has 100 ergs; he uses 50 percent the same way a white man does, dealing with what the white man has [to deal with], so he has 50 percent left. But he uses 25 percent fighting being black, [with] all the problems being black and what it means.” (Feagin and Sikes 1994, 295-6)

Many of the Latinos I spoke with also have to use some of their ergs of energy dealing with discrimination and racism. For those who were more identifiable, this was more of an issue than for those who could more easily pass as white. However every student had to think about this issue, whether they experienced these things directly, or it was someone they cared about like a family member or close friend. Clearly, white racism is a big issue for many students both on and off campus.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Education to the modern world is a burden which we are driven to carry. We shirk and complain. We do just as little as possible and only threat or catastrophe induces us to do more than a minimum. If the ignorant mass, panting to know, revolts, we dole them gingerly enough knowledge to pacify them temporarily. (Du Bois 2003, 216)

This research has filled a hole in the current literature about Latino students and their experiences with racism and discrimination. By approaching this analysis from a systemic racism theoretical perspective, this study has gone a step further than the current literature which tends to focus on individual student identity development or fails to talk deeply about how racism and discrimination might impact student experiences. Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States and they are projected to surpass whites in numbers in the next 50 years. Their experiences in the education process are very important when thinking about the impact that education has on occupational and status outcomes in the United States.

As we have seen, Latinos face discrimination and racism from whites at the individual level and institutional level, both on and off-campus. At the university, students encounter negative stereotypes about Latinos. They are often asked to represent their entire group in classes, minimizing the diversity that exists among Latinos. Students face doubt about their abilities and their worthiness to attend the university, which can have an impact on how students view themselves and their potential. Some students have encountered derogatory names, though most did not experience this on campus. Many whites feel that racism is no longer a problem in contemporary society,

but instead something that occurred in the past; this research has shown that for students of color, racism factors into their educational experience, as well as their day-to-day experiences off-campus, in a variety of ways.

### **Research Findings**

As specified in Chapter I, this research had four major predictions. I will list them again here for review:

- Contrary to the popular belief that racism and discrimination are no longer major issues in today's society, Latino students will face racism and discrimination on both the individual and institutional levels.
- The proportion of Latino students at a university or in the state will not affect whether or not Latinos face discrimination.
- Students who are less identifiable as Latinos and more able to pass as white will face less discrimination.
- Racism has an impact on how students view their university culture and their satisfaction at the university.
- Because of the systemic nature of racism, Latinos may also adopt white beliefs about their group, other groups, and the racial order in society.

When looking at the first hypothesis, that Latinos will experience racism and discrimination, I have found a great deal of support that this was the case for the students that I spoke with. One major way this occurs has to do with language. On-campus,



Latinos are negatively sanctioned by whites for using their native language. Often this occurs as comments about the “American-ness” of speaking Spanish. Other times, Latinos are given nasty looks that create an atmosphere of hostility and discomfort. There is an expectation from whites that Latinos should assimilate to the dominant culture, without a real willingness to adopt aspects of Latino culture. Students faced these types of issues on all three campuses, which shows how pervasive white racism is. Other types of white racism Latino students faced included the white belief that Latinos were filling a quota, which is why they were at the university; being asked to speak for all Latinos; white assumptions that all Latinos are immigrants; whites expressing negative comments about immigration; and the pressure to assimilate to white folkways. Some Latinos encountered unfriendliness once whites were aware that they were racially different from them. A few students were called derogatory names. Additionally, Latinos encountered a number of negative stereotypes about their group from whites, including comments from faculty and students. Often the comments involved whites seeing Latinos as criminals, unintelligent, poor, and so on. Many students talked about the low expectations they felt that whites had about them. Students on all three campuses encountered racism of some sort, which speaks to the second prediction; that the proportion of Latinos on a campus would not deflect racism.

Latinos also faced a great deal of discrimination on the institutional level. Universities are historically white arenas and they continue to be so today. Many aspects of the university are still white dominated. Probably the most shocking finding was the issue of Latino faculty on all three campuses. Almost universally, students saw

this as an issue on their campus. It was difficult for them to find faculty members that looked like them or that they could relate to. When students did have Latino instructors, they were often non-tenured and/or teaching only in Latino areas (like Mexican American studies or Spanish.) Increasing Latino faculty membership and tenure, as well as diversifying departments are important issues that institutions of higher education must face if they truly want to retain Latino students. Most of the adult Latino faces that students saw were those working in lower (and underappreciated) positions at the university. This included food service, landscaping, maintenance, and custodial work. Latino students saw this pattern of work as lowering their status at the university, as well as reinforcing what they see as low expectations from whites about their potential.

Latinos are also underrepresented in the curriculum and symbolically on some campuses. Though Southwest University has done a better job with symbolic representation in terms of artwork, statues, and celebrations that represent Latinos, all three campuses lacked diversity in their curriculum. Latino culture and history are not often discussed in general education classes (like American history) and instead are relegated to specialized courses. Though students are not denying the importance of those courses and departments, the result is that diversity becomes optional. If they do not take those courses, they will not learn about their people, and neither will whites. At Midwest and Southern University, symbolic representation was also a big issue. Latinos were rarely represented around campus in things like artwork and statues, though Southern University students were looking forward to the arrival of a statue of Cesar Chavez. Though Midwest University did a poor job of representing any students of

color symbolically, students noticed that when they did see art, it was often in the form of photographs from the university's past—a past that did not include people of color. At Southern University, symbols of white racism are present in the statues of Confederate soldiers and buildings named after racists. These symbols (or lack of symbols) create an atmosphere that is not welcoming to Latinos. Often there are very few places on campuses that they feel they can call their own because of racialized space. Additionally, students noticed that Latinos were not represented in leadership positions. A few Southern University students pointed out that a recent student body president was Latino, but some had the impression that he was able to win because he had conformed to white norms, making him an appealing candidate for whites. On all three campuses students could point to examples of institutional racism. Institutions of higher education, whether they are in the South, in predominantly Latino areas, or in located big cities, still organize themselves around white ideals and values. Students of color are admitted in greater numbers, but by and large the institutions remain a white place.

These findings are similar to those found by Feagin, Imani, and Vera (1996) in their interviews with African American undergraduate students. Their respondents also had negative encounters with the police; felt excluded from campus life; were asked to represent their entire race in classes; encountered negative stereotypes; lacked support from staff and faculty, including in the form of faculty members; and so on. Some of their respondents talked about transferring to a black university rather than staying at their current university. The students in my study were overwhelmingly planning on

staying at their university and graduating from there. Only one student talked about transferring, and that was because he wanted to be closer to his family that lived in a different state. A few students felt that they received less attention in the curriculum than African Americans and that they experienced more discrimination because of the recent immigration protests. Latinos are often seen as un-American or foreign, even though many of them were born in the United States. Though there are some differences in what Latinos and African Americans experience when comparing these two groups, both sets of students still encounter a number of obstacles at the university because of white racism.

All of the students could talk about something happening to them off campus in terms of racism and discrimination, even if they had not had experiences on campus. Almost all of the students experienced or knew someone who experienced mistreatment by the police. Several students faced rude and unfriendly treatment as customers in restaurants or stores. They felt criminalized when they were surveilled by whites in those situations. They also felt criminalized when whites gave them non-verbal cues of their discomfort around Latinos (like crossing the street when a Latino is approaching or checking their valuables in the presence of Latinos.) Students faced negative treatment from whites when they used Spanish off-campus in ways that were similar to what they experienced on campus. Many talked about getting negative looks from whites that created a hostile, uncomfortable environment. Students responded to mistreatment in a variety of ways, including confronting the person; avoiding mostly white areas and

instead going to Latino stores and restaurants; ignoring the behavior; making a joke of it; and explaining the action as something other than racism.

Students experienced this type of racism in different regions of the country, in different cities, and in areas that were near their campuses. Again, we see the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. These are not white actions that are isolated to one area, but instead are common in many areas. This supports the second prediction that the proportion of Latinos will not greatly impact the likelihood of experiencing racism. At the same time, a few students I spoke with did not experience as much discrimination as other Latinos. Though this research did not fully explore why some students did not experience mistreatment, one pattern that did come up was the issue of identifiability. Students who were more able to pass as white generally faced less discrimination. Light-skinned Latinos often had less to report in terms of incidents that they had experienced, but could sometimes share things that friends or family experienced. There was variation in terms of whether this group of students felt discrimination was a big issue, with some acknowledging that though they do not face it personally, it is a problem for more identifiable Latinos; others thought it was not an issue and that if Latinos were more willing to assimilate, the problems would not exist. These students were also more likely to explain the treatment as having to do with something other than race (i.e.-“maybe they were just having a bad day” or “maybe that person just doesn’t like me.”) This group of students did notice however that they were sometimes treated differently when whites realized that they were Latinos, which was sometimes positive and other times quite negative.

Additionally, Latinos who could pass as white were in a position where they were not seen as Latino enough and not seen as white enough. This is certainly an issue that needs further exploration. However, there was still support for the prediction that less-identifiable Latinos would not face as much racism, and that as students are more assimilated toward whiteness, they begin to take on ideas about white racism and discrimination. What is also key is that all of the students had at least one incident of racism to share, showing again how prevalent white racism is, and that very few students are immune from it. Even if they do not directly encounter the white racial frame in the form of discrimination, some students are still clearly influenced by it in their views about whether racism is an issue.

Unlike much of the previous research about Latinos in higher education, this study focuses on how racism and discrimination impact students' perceptions of their university and their satisfaction in higher education. As previously stated, though almost all of the students were planning on graduating from their university, their frustration is clear. The student comments often demonstrate the obstacles that Latino students face, including a lack of Latino role models on campus; feeling totally neglected in the curriculum; feeling that support for them is either not available or isolated to specific offices; feeling unwelcome in some areas of campus (especially where white fraternities and sororities are located); and being forced to fit a traditional student model. A number of the students I spoke with commute to campus. A few of them live with their families off-campus and spend a great deal of time working. Others are parents themselves. In many ways, the Latino students I spoke with were on campus

just to take their classes and then left because of the other priorities in their lives.

Though this was not the case for all the students in the sample, a lot of them were not a part of the campus in traditional ways. They did not have the time to spend on student activities or athletic events or even a college social life.

Often the university does not bend to include students of color, with non-traditional student characteristics, in these aspects of the university. These patterns also point to discrimination in wider-society. As we know, Latinos lag behind whites in terms of income and employment, making it more difficult for Latino parents to be able to pay for their student's education. These things impact whether the student can live on campus, participate in activities that might take time away from a job, or will need to support themselves. These societal trends shape student experiences at the university as well.

I believe this study has shown the pertinence of racism and discrimination in the lives of Latino students. Racism is a part of their on-campus and off-campus lives. It shapes their interactions with whites on campus, where they feel welcome, what they hear in classes, and who is teaching them. White racism can create doubt for Latino students in their own abilities and worthiness to be at the university. We also see this frame work at play when students talk about the obstacles they face when seeking help, trying to find safe and comfortable space on campus, and when they are confronted with hostility when using their native language. Students also have to be concerned about racism when they are off-campus. Because of the stereotype of criminality, Latinos can expect to be surveilled when shopping, ignored in restaurants, or unjustly confronted by

the police. There is also tremendous pressure for Latinos to assimilate to the dominant, white culture in many areas of their lives. All of this is evidence supporting the relevance of the systemic racism framework in understanding racism for Latinos.

### **Areas Requiring Further Study**

A number of interesting issues came up during the research process that were beyond the scope of this study, but would be worthy of further investigation. One issue that came up frequently was the issue of identity. How students defined their racial group for themselves varied a great deal. Especially in New Mexico, the way that a student identified themselves spoke to where they saw themselves in the racial order. For example, those who identified as Spanish in New Mexico thought of themselves as being more closely related to Europeans than Mexicans. In fact, there was a connotation that being Spanish was better than being Mexican.

I think it's a way to set yourself [apart from] other groups. Like I said, it kinda, I think the main reason is to set yourself above Mexicans. Because Mexicans may be thought about as, you know, whatever the stereotypes is. And like I said earlier, you know, be, Mexican Indian, when you think Mexican you think Indian, you think primitive, and by saying Spanish you're above that. You're no longer Indian, the Indian, Mexican-Indian you know who's primitive. Now you're Spanish and you're above that. Southwest University Male 21

How students choose to identify could express something about how they understand themselves and the racial order in the United States. Other students also talked about the issue of being lumped into one category by the university or by greater society, which was another issue that I was not able to include in this study. By lumping all groups together, there is a lack of acknowledgement of the diversity among these groups; and in



the university setting that could mean isolating students who don't identify in a specific way.

Additionally, it would be important to discuss more thoroughly the intersection of race, class, and gender. This study is mostly focusing on the types of experiences that Latino students faced and what the patterns of racism were. However, those patterns were also shaped by gender and class (as well as identifiability as a person of color). There were a few instances where we saw the gendered nature of racism. For example, Latino males are more likely to be seen as threatening by whites than Latina women. Additionally, some students who identified as upper-class faced less discrimination than those who identified as working-class or poor. However, there were exceptions to both of these patterns. This issue requires further investigation.

I touched on how Latinos deal with racism and discrimination when it occurs, but this is another area that could be explored in more depth. Students were asked to talk about their usual reaction to racism and why they typically respond in that way. I also asked if their parents or family members had given them advice about how to deal with racism. As we have seen previously, there were a variety of responses to racism. It would be useful to explore this more thoroughly to see why some responses are more typical than others, and the context that might dictate a particular response. Students were told a variety of messages from their parents. Most were advised to use non-confrontation tactics to deal with racism and only a few were instructed to be more confrontational. A few students were told to have pride in their heritage, while others were told to just ignore racism when it comes up. Seven students did not report being

given any advice by family members on how to deal with these issues. Understanding the differences in how students respond and the advice they were given about how to deal with these issues would also be very interesting

Finally, I asked students to talk specifically about their university. I asked them how could improve, what it was doing well, and to describe the culture of the university in terms of race and ethnicity. They were also asked about how involved their parents were in helping them decide on a school, the criterion the students used in choosing a university, and if they felt diversity was a factor in deciding on what school to attend. Though I was not able to include that information here, I feel that this is also important information to explore later. Universities could benefit by hearing what students of color are benefiting from, what needs to improve, and how they view the university as a whole.

In terms of the research process itself, I feel it would be beneficial to conduct a few more interviews to ensure that the sample is representative. I attempted to ensure that I had a diverse group of students, so that I could avoid bias in the sample. The students varied in age, major, socioeconomic status, and other factors. However, because of problems with the recordings, the sample from Southwest University is small compared to the other two schools. It would be useful to hear from a few more students on that campus, as well as a few more men.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Universities often claim to value diversity. They actively recruit students of color in order to enhance the image of their school or because they truly value difference

on their campus. Administrators want their student bodies to be more tolerant of those that are different from themselves and, on the surface; their rhetoric provides the image of genuine interest in educational equality. At the same time, using race as a criterion for admission is being called into question, which affects the enrollment of students of color. Additionally, white students feel that their right to attend college is being taken from them when students of color are accepted into spots that they are not.

Some white students are even filing lawsuits against professors perceived as being liberal in order to pursue their “academic freedom”, which often means protesting ideas that conflict with their current value systems (Students For Academic Freedom.) The idea of education expanding a student’s current worldview is coming under fire by some students who feel their perspectives are being attacked by liberal faculty members. Ultimately this trend is leading to greater intolerance of ideas about equality and equity, as well as a lack of understanding for issues that students of color contend with. “Many white students in colleges and universities do not grasp the seriousness of the situation, nor do they recognize the feelings and reactions of underrepresented students. Although student attitudes continue to show that White students remain liberal in their attitudes about race relations, an undercurrent of resentment against affirmative action and other special programs for underrepresented populations shows a certain callousness on the part of many White students about race relations” (Altbach et al. 2002, 31). What my research shows is that many Latino students have faced racism and discrimination both on and off-campus, demonstrating that white racism is alive and well. Tolerance is often a veneer, hiding individual prejudice and institutional discrimination. This callousness

about race and the burdens that students of color carry with them due only to their race is what has guided this study.

When I was talking with a group of faculty about my research, they asked the question “Does this really matter? Were students really concerned about these things or only were after you asked them about it?” I feel confident that many of these students were very concerned about racism and discrimination. It is something that permeates their lives in many ways, whether pressuring them to assimilate to the English language or making them feel as though they do not deserve to be at the university. They have to worry about being mistreated by the police because of their race or receiving horrible service in hospitals or stores or restaurants because of their language. This is a salient issue for them, especially in a time when immigration has fueled even more racism from whites. This research does matter, because it shows us what Latinos face in a racist society, which has not been fully explored before. Racism is alive and well in our country, as this research clearly shows.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Kate Parks. I'm doing interviews for my dissertation research. This is part of a multi-university study of the everyday experiences of Latino students at three universities across the country. I am very pleased that you have agreed to interview and want to thank you now in advance for your participation.

Before we begin the interviews, I want to explain the process and go over the consent form with you.

I'd like to begin with some background questions:

1. What's your age?
2. What year are you?
3. What is your major?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. How would you characterize your family's socioeconomic status when you were growing up? (lower, middle, upper class?) What is your family's SES status currently?
6. What do your parents do for a living?
7. Describe your parents' educational background.
8. Describe your neighborhood when you were growing up. Do you remember the racial make-up?
9. Describe your high school's racial and ethnic composition.
10. How do you usually identify your race and ethnicity? On written documents? In informal situations? Why do you prefer that identification?
11. What made you choose to attend (school name)?
12. How involved were your parents in helping you choose a college?
13. How would you describe the racial composition of the university?
14. How would you describe the university culture?

15. Did any of this factor into your decision-making when you were looking at colleges? How so?

16. How would you define racism?

17. During your time at (school name), have you ever felt like you've been treated differently or mistreated because of your race while on campus?

18. Other students have talked about types of mistreatment they have experienced while on a mostly white campus. Please let me know if any of these things have happened to you or any Latino students you know

- a. white students assume you are at the university because of your race or affirmative action and not your merit.
- b. white students reacting negatively when they hear Latinos speaking in Spanish
- c. white students expect Latinos to assimilate to the majority culture and are unwilling to adopt aspects of Latino culture (one-way assimilation)
- d. whites assuming Latinos are immigrants and/or not U.S. citizens. See as not "American"
- e. Latinos are asked to speak for all Latino people when they are few in number in a classroom.
- f. whites acting differently or treating them differently when they realize they are interacting with a Latino
- g. whites talking negatively about immigration issues
- h. being called a derogatory name like wetback, mojado, spic, etc.)
- i. being asked what country you are from (assumption that you are not a U.S. citizen)

19. Some students have noticed institutional level discrimination at mostly white universities. Have you noticed any of these things while attending (school name)

- a. Latino concerns are not addressed by the university
- b. Latinos are not represented on campus (statues, artwork, celebrations, etc)
- c. Latinos are not represented on the faculty or in administrative positions, but are overrepresented in lower campus positions.
- d. Latinos are not represented in important student organizations or leadership positions (like student government)
- e. There is a lack of acknowledgement of cultural differences or expressing cultural differences.
- f. Latino culture and history is not represented in the curriculum.

20. Is there anything that you have to give up about your ethnic background in order to fit in at the university?

21. What are some stereotypes that you have encountered or heard from white students, faculty, or staff about Latinos? If you have not heard any directly, can you think of any stereotypes that whites might believe to be true about Latinos but don't express?
22. Are there places on campus where you feel unwelcome or unsafe because of your race?
23. What specifically leads to those feelings?
24. Talk a little about your closet friends on campus. What is their racial/ethnic background?
25. How much interaction do you have with white students on campus? Do you get invitations from whites to parties or social events or things like study groups?
26. Some students have reported types of mistreatment off-campus. Have any of these things happened to you or people you know?
- a. being pulled-over by the police for no reason
  - b. extremely bad service in a restaurant or store
  - c. whites being unwilling to touch your hand when give you money/change
  - d. unnecessary surveillance in a store
  - e. whites being slow to wait on you and serving white customers first.
  - f. people acting very unfriendly after realizing you are Latino (for example, seeing a Latino name on your credit card or ID)
  - g. whites reacting with anger or negativity when hearing people speak Spanish or with a strong accent
  - h. whites staring at you or showing physical discomfort in the presence of a Latino person
27. Latinos often see themselves or report their ethnicity as white, yet most whites see Latinos as a distinct racial group. What do you think about this?
28. When someone says something that you find racist or do something that seems discriminatory, what is your usual response? Why do you respond this way?
29. Did your parents or other family members talk to you about how to deal with racism or mistreatment because of race?
- If yes-what advice did they give you?
  - If no- why do you think they didn't?
30. Do you feel the University supports you as a Latino student?

31. Do you feel the level of support you get is the same or equal to the support that a white student gets? If not, how is it different?
32. Are there things that the school could be doing better to serve the needs of Latino students?
33. Do you plan on staying at this school and graduating from here?
34. What makes you stay? Is there anything that makes you want to leave?
35. Would you recommend this school to other Latino students? Any advice you would give them?
36. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a Latino student at (school name?)

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